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MESROP MASHTOTS





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On a scientific basis and in a simple manner the life and activity of Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian alphabet and the founder of the Armenian scripture, have been reflected in the book.

It is intended for the general reader.

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I

There* are events in the life of a people which turn out to be crucial for their entire history, for their very existence. For the Armenian people, such a great and fateful event was the creation of the alphabet. Having been divided between two powerful, rival states on the one hand, and being largely subjected to the influence of the Assyrian church on the other, the Armenian people led a very hard life. It was during those hard times that an enlightened man, Mesrop Mashtots, undertook to create the Armenian alphabet. He did this because of the need of his own people, and because of the encouragement and support given to him by the state and

* Translated from the Armenian by Gourgen A. Gevorkian.

the church. This step was undertaken in order to counterbalance geographical and governmental divisions, and to bring about the unification of literature and education as well as spiritual and intellectual life in general. The creation of the alphabet was of paramount importance for the Armenian people, not only in that period but also in the coming centuries. That was why the whole nation, the satrapy and the clergymen—in other words, the secular and holy powers—accepted it gladly. The global disasters following one another—the conquests, massacres, famine, slavery, emigration and epidemics could not extinguish the burning candle lit by Mesrop, and the conquerers' troops and the acts of violence of the assimilators turned out to be too feeble to overcome the power of those thirty-six letters. The destructive tendencies of the centuries were unable to erase the writing created by Mesrop. Armenian writing flourished, the Armenian thought created its immortal monuments in art and science, the studious and fiery soul of the nation always kept the candle of enlightenment burning, and through the blood and murder of centuries brought to our days the treasures of the Armenian talent. Magic signs! What our people could not do with their physical might they could do with the might of their thought. The troops of the foreign oppressors destroyed the country, and the Armenian people were divided and scattered and forced to migrate, but Armenian cul-

ture kept all Armenians together, kept the foundation of the spiritual edifice of the Armenian people firm. So powerful was the Mesropian writing that it has passed from generation to generation without any essential changes. It is natural to think that the alphabet created by Mesrop was so perfect and so exactly corresponded to the phonetic system of the Armenian language that the tremendous changes in the language which took place later on did not necessarily change the alphabet seriously.

Both his creation of the alphabet and his tremendous and extremely fruitful activity covered Mesrop Mashtots with glory, and it is not surprising that from the fifth century to this day Mesrop's life and his activity, the creation and the development of the Armenian alphabet, have been a subject of particular attention. Even today Mesrop's life and his activity, the circumstances under which the Armenian alphabet was created, and the history of the Armenian letters are of great interest to Armenologists both in Armenia and in foreign countries. Researchers still put forward different opinions and hypotheses as to the origin and the development of the Armenian written culture as well as some factors connected with the creation of the Mesropian alphabet; the final solution to these questions will require new results and data from historians, philologists and especially from archeologists.

The most reliable source of information on Mesrop Mashtots, who was not only the creator of the Armenian letters and Armenian literature, but also the first teacher and the founder of the Armenian school, is his pupil Koryun's book "The life of Mashtots". By the general concensus of Armenologists, this book was written after Mesrop's death: not earlier than in 443 and not later than in 448. These limit-dates are based on certain data in Koryun's book, the most important of which are:

a) Koryun wrote his book after Mesrop's death; that is, not earlier than in 439/440.

b) Koryun writes in his book that Vahan Amatuni built a cathedral on his tomb within three years of Mesrop's death. This means that the book was not written in those three years or at least it was not completed.

c) Describing the death and the funeral of Patriarch Sahak, Koryun writes: "Every year they get together in the same month to perform ceremonies in his memory" (137)¹. The word-combination "eve-

¹ For passages from Koryun's "Life" and Khorenatsi's "History", only page-numbers are given in brackets; in all other cases, the number of the work in the bibliography is cited, followed by the page reference.

ry year" may mean events in several years or at least in three or four years, since for one or two years one would not say "every year". If we assume that this was written within 3—4 years of Sahak's death (439), we arrive at 442/43.

d) Koryun's book could not have been written after 450, because Koryun speaks very highly of Vasak after the events preceding the Vardanants War and after the war Koryun would not praise a man who was considered to be a traitor. This opinion is confirmed by another fact: Koryun writes that Patriarch Hovsep asked him to write a biography of Mesrop. But after the Vardanants War Patriarch Hovsep was captured (451) and was executed in 453, so he could only have asked Koryun before the Vardanants War, when he was still Patriarch.

Koryun's book, though very brief, is the only reliable source about Mesrop Mashtots's life and his activity. Koryun is one of the first pupils of Mesrop; later on he became his collaborator. Knowing his teacher personally and collaborating with him, he, naturally, witnessed Mesrop's activity and wrote down what he knew. In certain cases he made use of the information gathered from well-informed people. In this connection he writes the following: "We did not record them by gleaning them from old tales; on the contrary, we witnessed their countenances, as assistants in (their) spiritual endea-

vors, were hearers of their gracious teaching, and were their co-workers as per the dictum of the Gospel. We have done this for my father, not by resort to false eloquence, but we wrote (this) concise work by leaving out much and by gathering from all best informed people, (facts) which are known not only to us but to those who have read this book" (299—300).

These lines are solid evidence of one thing.

a) Though he knew much about his teacher Mashtots's life and activity, he wrote only what he considered to be most important.

b) In addition to what he knew personally he made use of what 'wise people' had told him. In fact, he only confirmed what he knew.

c) This book was read by at least a few of those "wise people". "Those who read this book knew" that he did not make things up. He wrote only the truth, and indeed in writing Mesrop's biography he not only realized his personal desire but was also carrying out some order. "And while I was thinking of the events I received an order from Hovsep, a very respectable person, to do it and not only this order but also the encouragement of our fellow students" (71). It goes without saying that Patriarch Hovsep's "order" and his fellow students' encouragement put a great responsibility on Koryun. They would read what he had written and it is natural, if he were to write anything untrue, then they would

reprimand him. Moreover, from what Koryun has written we can see that while he was writing his book some people were reading it. "We have written briefly what famous people have said not only for us but also for those who will read this book" (146). Thus we can assume that Koryun gave his book to his friends to read before it was completed. Perhaps they liked it, or perhaps there were some objections and certain changes were suggested. All this leads us to the conclusion that Koryun's book is quite accurate. No wonder that all the historians who have come back to Mesrop's life and activity and the history of the alphabet, have mainly rewritten Koryun's account. We will, then, describe Mesrop's life and activity guided by the true facts given in Koryun's book.

3

Mesrop Mashtots was born to a farming family in the village of Hatsekats in the province of Taron in Armenia. It is believed that Mashtots was born in 362. We know that Mesrop's father's name was Vardan. According to Koryun and to our other historians (Parpetsi, Khorenatsi and others) Mesrop received a good education in his native province, after which he went to Vagharshapat, the capital of Armenia, and served as a secretary in the palace of Khosrov III. Then he became a military man.

He knew Greek, Assyrian, and Persian, which were the accepted languages for scribing at the Armenian court. It is not known exactly how many years he served in the palace but we know that he was loved and respected there. Koryun reminds us that "he... was esteemed by his men for his mastery of the military art". Though he was promoted, Mesrop left military service, became a clergyman and dedicated himself to asceticism, spending his life in solitude, living in caves. During this period others supported him; most probably, they became either his followers or his pupils. Afterwards, he and his pupils left for Goghtn, where the people were pagans and maintained their pagan customs. The prince Shabit met him half way, welcomed him and enabled him to carry on his pastoral activity.

As Koryun witnessed, he made all the people in the province of Goghtn accept Christianity, the leaders of the pagans were driven to Marastan.

This success, however, did not satisfy Mesrop. He was anxious to be useful to all the Armenian people. He did not think that he had gained much by abolishing paganism in one province. Pagans still remained in different places, and those who had adopted Christianity did not understand anything in the church ceremonies and sermons. After his departure and perhaps even in his presence they professed, in secret, the Paganism which had been theirs for centuries and which was more comprehen-

sible and dear to them. A century's experience itself showed that Christianity was proclaimed as the official religion in Armenia at the beginning of the 4th century, whereas at the beginning of the 5th century, or at least at the end of the fourth, it had not yet been adopted by large numbers in many places. The historians and Mesrop himself explain this fact by noting that in the churches, the ceremonies, sermons and prayers were conducted in either Greek or Assyrian, which were unintelligible to people; thus the essence of Christianity, in fact, remained inaccessible to the people. This was a matter of great concern to Mesrop, and not only to him. The reason was that in those times Christianity was an important factor in maintaining a unified national spiritual edifice for the development of a unified culture, for the existence of the Armenians. In Mesrop's day the Armenian people led a very hard life. In 387, having been divided between two great states, the Armenian people had in fact lost not only their independence and their territorial-political unity, but also came under the influence of different cultures and policies. The region of Armenia under the Roman empire had become a protectorate of the Byzantine empire, which was ruled by the "emperor" of the "general". The Eastern region, though formally still a kingdom, was under Persia, and was dependent on the king of Persia, paying taxes and being unable even to conduct its internal affairs

without his consent. The bisection of the country on the one hand and the absence of their own letters and literature on the other threatened the Armenian people still further. As the state, educational and religious language was Greek, as Assyrian was spoken in the country, and as Persian predominated in the Eastern region—this state of affairs depriving the Armenian people of understanding Christianity in their mother tongue—the people had to fight for their political, economic and cultural unity. The danger of assimilation threatened both regions of the country. Though in the Eastern part the Persian sovereignty did not tolerate Christianity, history showed that this resistance could not last long. The Persian kings were eager to abolish Christianity and make Armenians adopt Zoroastrianism, which is known to have resulted in the Vardanants War. This forced change of religion meant the assimilation of Armenians with Persians. Given this state of affairs, Mesrop's anxiety was not surprising. In Goghtn, which was in Eastern Armenia, he was convinced by his preaching experience that under the existing circumstances large numbers of people could not fully grasp the essence of Christianity, which, as we have mentioned, was preached either in Greek or Assyrian, both of which were unintelligible to the people. Moreover, under those circumstances spreading Christianity among the Armenian people was not a mere religious task but

rather a political-ideological one, as it might become the only means to prevent assimilation. Consequently, it was natural that Mesrop should be eager to see all Armenians adopting Christianity, rather than contenting himself with what he had achieved within the boundaries of a single province. All this is briefly but very clearly described by Koryun: "And as he implanted in them the word of life, there appeared many miracles that are known to all the people of the province... He resolved to have greater concern for the consolation of the people of the entire land; (therefore) he increased his moanful prayers to God with upraised hands and ceaseless tears remembering the words of the Apostle who said: "I am sorrowful and constant in my heartache for my brethren and my kin".

He was thus surrounded and ensnared with sad worries and engulfed by waves of apprehension as to how he might find a solution to the "problem" (276). And as Khorenatsi and Parpetsi witness, it was under these circumstances and in this state of mind that Mesrop arrived at the idea of creating the Armenian alphabet. Koryun's as well as Khorenatsi's and Parpetsi's testimony about Mesrop's anxiety and sufferings which sometimes bear a religious shade and are ascribed to divine inspiration, in fact have one basis—Mesrop's keen mind deeply grasped the historical situation of his epoch and its further disastrous consequences, and found

the powerful means which would enable the Armenian people to keep their national identity, their ideological and cultural unity and thus avoid the danger of assimilation. In other words it was Mesrop, the greatest Armenian, who found the means to maintain the national independence of the Armenian people. It was the creation of the alphabet, the translation of Christian literature into Armenian, the creation of a native Armenian literature, and the development of the written culture to which he devoted the rest of his life. After formulating his intentions Mesrop returned to Vagharshapat to ask the Patriarch for help in finding a solution.

4

What Koryun and other writers have told us about Mesrop's anxiety concerning the creation of the Armenian alphabet and formation of the Armenian written culture raise, for Armenologists, an inevitable question. Could it be that Armenians did not have a writing and literature before the fifth century and that Mesrop had to take up the creation of the Armenian alphabet and then to originate a literature in Armenian? In general, Armenology answers this question affirmatively: before the fifth century the Armenians had a written culture. This answer is grounded by known and irrefutable facts, on the one hand, and sound, entirely logical

considerations, on the other. Among the irrefutable facts is the prechristian theatre, whose existence implies the existence of theatrical works also. We know that the Armenians had a theatre during the empire of Artashes: there were performances of Greek tragedies and theatrical works were written in Greek (e. g. the plays by Artavazd). As far as the written culture alone is concerned one thing is irrefutable, namely, that the ancient Armenians had a written culture. Then our historians, Khorenatsi in particular, give quite definite information about the heathen literature that was created and used in the Armenian heathen temples. Khorenatsi himself witnesses that there existed different chronicles in Greek and Persian as well as "conversation books". All these facts confirm that before adopting Christianity the Armenians had a written culture and created their own literature, of course, making use of literature in foreign languages, mainly Persian and Greek.

These facts are also supported by sound reasoning. Armenian literature of the fifth century was multilateral in character—philosophical, religious-philosophical, biographical and historical, and was at such a level of development that it could not have been created in an "open field", i. e. without having passed through a long development. The important thing is that the level of the fifth century literature represents the level of the Eastern civiliza-

tion of its epoch (Iran, India) and the West (Greek-Roman). It also represents the achievements of the scientific thought of its time. One must especially mention the translations and the Armenians' own literature on philosophy, grammar, art, and book-keeping, requiring a certain knowledge of astronomy, which presupposes the prehistory of these sciences: that is, their development in Armenia before the fifth century. The facts available to us support this supposition. The Armenian people had lived in the midst of developed civilizations and could not help following their line of development and creating their own written culture. Armenian culture began to develop swiftly even in the period of the formation of the Armenian people and the Armenian independent state. The Armenians had been influenced by the Greek, Roman and Persian civilization and especially borrowed from the Hellenic culture and Persian Zoroastrianism, the Persian and Greek mythology, and had made their own mythology and romance. It is clear that all this could not but enable the Armenian people to originate and develop their own independent written culture. If this historical fact is irrefutable, then the conclusion based on this fact is undeniable. Thus, this truth, universally accepted, *becomes a sound and objective basis for the belief that the Armenians had created a written culture and literature long before the fifth century.*

The truth accepted by all Armenologists puts

forward another question: what language was that written culture in—Armenian or another language? That the Armenians had created literature in other languages (Persian and Greek) is undeniable. The question is this: had the Armenians written anything in Armenian before the fifth century? In answering this question Armenologists are divided into two groups. Some Armenologists deny the existence of literature in Armenian before the fifth century, i. e. before the creation of the Mesropian alphabet. Others think that the Armenians must have created Armenian literature and that Persian, Greek and Assyrian letters must have been used to write Armenian. They especially emphasize the existence of the heathen literature, arguing that in the Armenian heathen temples the priests must have written and officiated the rites in Armenian, otherwise their religious ideas and ceremonies would have been incomprehensible to the Armenians. When we speak about the heathen writing and literature, we must take into consideration the fact that the paganism of old Armenians had much in common with Zoroastrianism (some think that it was the same Zoroastrianism), so it may be that the heathen priests who mastered Persian could write also in Persian. But even if we exclude this possibility, we cannot attach great importance to the heathen writing and records. One must not forget that the old religions were not as popular as Christianity,

and that the ability to read the heathen registers, perform the ritual ceremonies and so forth, were thought to be the privilege of the heathen priests. This means that the heathen priests were not interested in creating literature accessible to the people. If we were to admit that the Armenian heathen priests had written not in Pahlavi, but had created their own system of letters to write in Armenian, it would still not have been of importance for Armenian literature of the prechristian period, or for the development of the written culture in general. It would have been the mysterious "literature" of the isolated class of priests and nothing more. Thus, one is led to the conclusion that Armenian was written with the characters of other languages. Indeed, certain Armenologists hold the opinion that before adopting Christianity the Armenians had developed their written culture in Armenian using Persian and Greek characters. However, there exist serious objections to this opinion, the most important of which are the following:

1. If the Armenians had used one of the alphabets—Persian, Greek or Assyrian—or all three of them simultaneously or in succession (let us assume Persian first, then Greek, then, after the adoption of Christianity, Assyrian)—these alphabets must have been adjusted to the Armenian language. None of these three alphabets were by themselves appropriate for the Armenian language, the

Greek alphabet had 24 letters, the Assyrian 22, while Persian (Partevi or Arshakuni Pahlavi, now called Partevi, and Sassani Pahlavi) also had 22 letters. It is difficult to imagine that the Armenians had used these alphabets without adding letters or signs for the Armenian sounds, the letters of which did not exist in those alphabets. If they had added some it means one of those alphabets had to be adjusted and that one would have become the Armenian alphabet: in that case in the fifth century the question of perfecting that alphabet would have arisen, precluding the necessity of creating a new alphabet.

2. If the Armenians had used a system of letters for centuries to write in Armenian and had created a literature, though a poor one, why has not a single book from that literature ever reached us? This "why" is very easy to answer for the prechristian period. The literature of that period was heathen and while adopting Christianity it or at least its greater part was destroyed. And if some works were preserved they were worn out and destroyed with time: being heathen writing they were not rewritten and restored. As far as fourth century Armenian Christian literature with foreign letters is concerned, one cannot answer this question in the same way. If we admit that in the fourth century, in adopting Christianity, the church translated at least certain parts of the Gospel (the New Testament) into Armenian, and the Armenian patriarchs, Gregory the

Illuminator in particular, wrote a few speeches and prayers in Armenian, there arises a question: Why has nothing been preserved? The writings of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, the founder of the Armenian Gregorian church, were to be considered sacred, and when Mesrop created his alphabet, those writings, alongside with the translation of the Bible, were to be written in the newly created alphabet and preserved. This consideration presupposes denying the existence of Armenian Christian literature after the adoption of Christianity and before the creation of the Mesropian alphabet. Thus we have to admit that Armenian literature with foreign letters might only have existed in the prechristian period. There is still a very serious objection to this supposition. Armenia is famous for its inscriptions written in foreign languages and preserved to this day in Greek, Assyrian, Aramaic and Latin. How is it that the Armenians who had used foreign letters in writing Armenian literature, had not produced a single inscription in Armenian? At the base of these objections there is one undeniable fact: so far, nothing has been found written in Armenian (an inscription, a piece of parchment, money and so on). And "there is not" cannot be changed into "there is" on the basis of suppositions and unreliable statements. So the question remains open. We can undoubtedly suppose that the Armenians had Armenian literature, but to this day nothing has been discovered.

Thus we have to wait for further research, especially for the results of new archeological investigations, to get an exhaustive answer to the question.

Thus, not denying the possibility of the existence of Armenian prechristian literature, we nevertheless have to admit under the pressure of the facts that, at present, the real and undeniable fact is the existence of the fourth century Christian written culture in foreign languages before the creation of the Mesropian alphabet. As research and the level of the fifth century literature have shown, that written culture was developed and represented the level of civilization of the East and the West (Greek—Roman, Assyrian). That Armenians had been writing in foreign languages for centuries and had created their own independent science, art and literature is not an exceptional or strange thing. In the period of Arshakuni (Parthian) dynasty for about 250 years (until the first century A. D.) the literary language of the Parthians was Greek. Nothing written in Parthian (an inscription, a note on coins or on pottery) has been found so far. After the Arab invasions all the Mohammedan peoples of the East used Arabic, then Persian, as a literary language. Avicenna wrote his scientific and literary works in Arabic and Persian, Nizami Guanjevi in Persian, and so on. Numerous European peoples created tremendous scientific, historical, astronomical, medical, philological, and philosophical litera-

ture in Latin in the Middle Ages. Why should we not remember with pride that ancient Armenians created a rich written culture and developed it in Persian and Greek.

Whatever the solution to this question, one thing is clear: when Mesrop was carrying out his preaching activity, Armenian letters did not exist, the Bible and other religious books had not been translated into Armenian, religious ceremonies were carried out in Assyrian, and it was this set of circumstances that motivated Mesrop's work.

5

After returning to Vagharshapat, Mesrop went to Sahak, the Patriarch, and told him about his anxiety and concern. It turned out that Sahak was of the same mind and that the adoption of Christianity by the people was close to his heart: hence he readily accepted Mesrop's suggestion. Both men, inspired by the thought of creating Armenian characters, gathered a public council, where outstanding religious leaders were present. The meeting approved of Mesrop's inspiring suggestion and his plans for its realization. The agreement of the Armenian clergymen shows that by creating Armenian letters and literature, the Armenian clergy wanted to eliminate the influence of the Greek and Assyrian churches in the spiritual and cultural domains as

well, and to get rid of Greek and Assyrian preachers and high ranking religious leaders, who were active in large numbers throughout Armenia and, naturally, interfered with the work of the Armenian clergy. What role the foreign clergy played in Armenia can be judged by the events of the twenties of the same century. It is known that through the intrigue of the Assyrian clergy in 428, Sahak was deprived of his patriarchal throne and that through the direct interference of the Persian state he was replaced by Surmak—an Assyrian Patriarch. Under such circumstances it was not surprising that the public council unanimously supported the proposal of creating an Armenian alphabet and a native literature.

Inspired by the council's approval, Mesrop and Sahak Patriarch began their search to discover or create Armenian characters. They told King Vramshapouh of their intention: he also approved of the idea. This circumstance shows the necessity arising from the political and ideological situation of the time, the unified striving of the spiritual and temporal powers to resist the threat of the assimilation of the Armenian people. Encouraging this initiative, King Vramshapouh at the same time told them that an Assyrian bishop named Daniel "unexpectedly had come into possession" of letters of the Armenian alphabet and that he (the King) had once been informed of that discovery. Patriarch Sahak

and Mesrop, hearing this, exhorted the King to see to it that the letters were brought and put into use. The King agreed gladly and sent a man named Vahritj to Habel, an intimate of Bishop Daniel. Vahritj told Habel the aim of his mission and Habel did what Vramshapouh had asked without delay. Going to Daniel, he procured the characters and sent them to the "King in the land of Armenia", on the fifth year of Vramshapouh's reign. Everybody was pleased by that unexpected discovery: they gathered "young children" and Mesrop began to teach them those characters. However, very soon it became known that those characters, which are known in Armenology as "Danielian letters" or "Danielian characters", are not Armenian, and do not meet the requirements of the Armenian language. That alphabet was not sufficient for the rich phonetic system of Armenian. Giving it up, Mesrop and his co-workers again faced the same anxiety.

6

In Mesrop's activity and in the history of the creation of the Armenian alphabet "Danielian characters" have become a subject of serious discussion. What hypotheses have not been proposed by scientists, what fables have not been thought out and are being thought out from the fifth century to this day!

In his book Koryun relates the following incident very briefly and clearly.

When the King was told about the problem which worried them: "The King told them of a man named Daniel, an Assyrian bishop of noble lineage, who unexpectedly had come into possession of the letters of the Armenian alphabet. And when the King told them about Daniel's discovery, they prevailed upon him to do what was needful. Then he dispatched a man named Vahritj along with messages to a priest called Habel, who was an intimate of Bishop Daniel.

As for Habel, upon hearing it, he hastened to Daniel, and first became familiar, through Daniel, with the letters, then taking them from him sent to the King in the land of Armenia. The (letters) reached his hands on the fifth year of his reign. Upon receiving the letters from Habel, the King rejoiced with Sahak and Mashtots.

Then the blessed stewards taking the unexpectedly discovered object of their search requested of the King young children through whom they might experiment with the alphabet. And when many of them had been taught, the King commanded that everywhere the instruction be effected through the same (letters). Thus the blessed one attained the noble rank of teacher, and taught for two years with the use of the same letters.,

Yet when they became aware of the fact that

those letters were insufficient to form all the syllables of the Armenian language, especially since the letters essentially proved to have been buried and then resurrected from other languages, they found themselves once more in the same anxieties and for some time were engaged in search of a solution" (277—278). In this brief but clear passage of Koryun, we find the exact story of the "Danielian characters" in its natural, to be more exact, historical succession and logical sequence of events.

The following facts are of interest in that story.

1. Vramshapouh says that a certain Assyrian bishop Daniel had found the Armenian characters. Koryun writes what the King said in such a way ("The King told them of a man named Daniel, an Assyrian bishop") that it becomes clear the King had not heard about the Armenian characters from Daniel; he did not even know him. This is also established by the fact that if he had known Daniel he would have known where he lived, and he would have sent Vahritj to him and not to Habel. Since Vahritj was sent to Habel, one is to suppose that it was Habel who had told the King about what Daniel had found. Then Koryun writes that the King said Daniel had unexpectedly come into possession of the Armenian characters. "Unexpectedly had come into possession" clearly shows that Daniel had not aimed to find or invent the Armenian characters, but had suddenly found them when

he was busy with something else. It was a sudden discovery like the one of the Aghvan letters by the Georgian philologist I. Abuladze. Everybody knows that in Matenadaran (the repository of ancient manuscripts) he studied the Armenian manuscripts to collect information concerning the Georgians, their language and culture. It was during those studies that, in a manuscript containing the alphabets of various languages, he found the Aghvan letters. Such a discovery must have been what Daniel had suddenly found. When telling about getting the letters, Koryun writes: "taking the unexpectedly discovered object", i. e. again "the unexpectedly found". All this shows that the so called Danielian characters had not been created by Daniel, as has been assumed by a number of Armenologists.

2. Of particular interest is the part of the story concerning Mesrop's activity after receiving the Danielian characters, Koryun goes on to say that Sahak and Mesrop went to the King taking the unexpectedly discovered object, requested of the King "young children". After learning the characters, the children were sent to different places and Mesrop himself continued his teaching, i. e. he found new groups of youngsters and taught them. For this he received the degree of Vardapet, i. e. teacher. What is of importance here is that Mesrop and Sahak, having received the Danielian characters, began

first of all to teach young people these characters. In this passage Koryun does not say a word about his translations, and it is quite natural. Mesrop began to think about the Armenian letters during his preaching activity. He was striving for one thing: to get (to create, or to receive) the Armenian letters, to teach the Armenian youth these letters and then to send his pupils out to preach. When they got the Danielian letters, they were very glad that the problem was solved in such an easy way and it was natural that their first concern was to teach a group of young people these characters. This was Mesrop's as well as Sahak's first concern. Perhaps this was the reason why Mesrop, Sahak and their pupils could not understand immediately that the received signs were not Armenian letters and could not meet the requirements of writing Armenian. The reason for the whole misunderstanding was that they had believed the Assyrian bishop Daniel, who himself was of the same belief, and took those signs for Armenian letters without hesitation. This exceptional belief was perhaps the reason why those signs were not tested in actual writing to ascertain if they were appropriate for Armenian. The fact that Mesrop's first aim was to teach young people is proved by another part of Koryun's testimony. Mesrop created his Armenian letters and in Samosata he tested their usefulness by translating the "Book of Fables". Hav-

ing written the first sentence, he returned to his fatherland. He stayed in Vagharshapat for several days and instead of teaching the young people and continuing his translation activity, he went to "the country of Marats". He stayed here and taught the young people until they fully realized the essence of laws and oracles (103). Only after that did Mesrop return to Vagharshapat and resume his translation activity: "And from then on continuing with the husbandry of God's activity, they began with the evangelical art—to translate, to write, and to teach" (281).

The comparison of these two passages suggests that, for Sahak and Mesrop, the training of young preachers who would know how to read and write Armenian was of paramount importance. These two passages not only prove this but also establish that each passage is properly placed and each exactly represents the history of Mesrop's activity according to the succession of actions. Thus there is no reason to change places with the second passage, as some "editors" have attempted to do. We think it proved that, having received the Danielian signs, Mesrop did not think it necessary to test them, because his belief was so strong that it did not occur to him to suspect and test, and even if he had wanted to test them he was not yet ready for it. He was an educated person, had gone deeply into the science of divinity, and was a good preach-

er, but he was not yet a phonetician. He knew Greek, Assyrian and Persian, he read and wrote these languages, and he had a perfect command of his mother tongue, which had no letters as yet. It is natural that during his previous activity and immediately after receiving the Danielian letters, he did not even consider what sounds the Armenian language had. Now the Armenian letters were found: write Armenian in the way you write Greek and teach this alphabet to your pupils. It was during his teaching that he gradually came to the conclusion that the signs sent by Daniel were not Armenian letters but were letters of some other language. Thus, for Mesrop, teaching was also learning and studying the phonetic system of the Armenian language. Discovering the shortcomings of the Danielian signs while teaching, he had to study the phonetic system of Armenian and when he became convinced that it was not really the Armenian alphabet, he undertook the deep and overall study of the phonetic system of the Armenian language. It took him two months, if not two years, to discover that the alphabet did not meet the requirements of writing in Armenian, which he might have felt in the first days. It is natural to think that for this purpose he made use of his knowledge of grammar gained during the years of his studies: perhaps he also had some textbooks on Greek grammar (e. g. the grammar by Dionysius) and again

studied the principles of phonetics and grammar generally to gain a scientific knowledge of the Armenian phonetics and grammar. It was after this preparatory work that he decided to create the Armenian letters and devoted himself to the task.

7

Khorenatsi relates almost the same story about the Danielian characters but with a different approach—expressing his negative attitude towards them.

After Koryun and Khorenatsi, Ghazar Parpetsi comes back to the history of the creation of the Armenian letters, noting that the whole history had been exactly written by Koryun and that he had learned it from him. But all the same, what he relates leads us to the fact that Mesrop had not created the Armenian alphabet at all. The Armenian letters had been with Daniel, they had been brought to Armenia and Mesrop together with the four assistants appointed by Patriarch Sahak, arranged them. Mesrop could not even translate the Bible, so the Satraps and the clergymen had asked Sahak to translate it. We do not think it necessary to discuss what Parpetsi says on this: it will suffice to quote H. Markvart's entirely correct conclusion: "Ghazar does not say a word about Mashtots's trip to Assyria (i. e. Mesopotamia), and the circumstances

connected with it. It is a deliberate digression, which comes from the infinite striving, vividly displayed, through which Ghazar, enraptured with Sahak, wants to ascribe to him not only the translation of the Bible but also the main merit of creating the Armenian alphabet. For this it was naturally necessary that the scene of action should be transferred to Armenia and that Mashtots should be deprived of his justly gained fame. Ghazar deserves a severe scolding for his attempt, which is a distortion of the historical facts" (15, 153).

Thus, the first of the three authors of the fifth century, Koryun, as a witness and a participant of Mesrop's activity, speaks of the Danielian characters truly but casually, Khorenatsi gives almost exactly the same account, editing Koryun's words according to his attitude, but Parpetsi entirely changes the history of the Armenian letters, ascribing everything to the Danielian characters. The authors of the succeeding centuries repeat the versions of these three sources, often mixing them and inventing different fictions. The number of the Danielian signs has been the subject of particular study. In the existing sources the number of the letters of the Danielian characters is 17, 19, 22, 24, 29. Hr. Atjarian has profoundly studied these numbers (11, 82—87) and has proved that those who speak of 24 letters identify the Danielian characters with the Greek alphabet. All these numbers are

of interest in the sense that they show the authors' orientation to Greek, Assyrian, or Persian. The number of the Danielian characters is defined according to this orientation: Mesrop knew Greek, Assyrian and Persian (Sassanian Pahlavi). No matter which of these the Danielian characters were, he would have recognized at first sight that those characters belonged to an alphabet which was unknown not only to Mesrop but also to the Assyrian Daniel. As to the Armenologists of modern times, they too have been guided by the facts of different scribes and have put forward various hypotheses on the basis of these. Their detailed history and study is given in Hr. Atjarian's book "The Armenian Letters". Thanks to that study by Hr. Atjarian as well as those by St. Malkhasian, M. Abeghian, H. Manandian and contemporary Armenologists, there is a consensus on the Danielian characters which directly follows from what Koryun has said. The Danielian characters were of a different culture: they had fallen out of use and were found by Daniel, who mistakenly thought them to be Armenian letters. Where did these letters come from and how did Daniel come to think that they were Armenian ones? An exhaustive answer to this question is given in Hr. Atjarian's 1946 study (13, B. G.).

Atjarian's starting point is the statement of Koryun according to which the letters found by Daniel had been "lost" characters of other writing

systems. This means that these characters must have been the letters of an alphabet which was no longer in use. Hr. Atjarian considers Aramaic to be such writing, it was no longer used in the 4th and 5th centuries. Could Daniel have confused the words Aramaic and Armenic (Armenian) in Assyrian (aramaya and armenaya)? Indeed he could have. Hr. Atjarian first shows that the difference between the two spellings is a small dash. So to confuse them would have been very easy. We want to add the following: in Assyrian the word aramaya consists of the name Aram and the suffix aya, which corresponds to the Armenian suffixes -ալին (ayin), -ական (akan), -յան (yan). We know that we Armenians have called ourselves by the following names: Haik-ian, Askanaz-ian, Aram-ian, Torgom-ian, Haikaz-ian: if we express our Արամյան (Aram-ian) with the Assyrian words we should again have Արամական (Aramakan)-Aram-aya. It so happens that in Assyrian there were two homonymous words *ārāmāyā* i. e. *ārāmāyā արամեական* (Arameakan) and *ārāmāyā արամական, արամյան* (Aramakan, Aramian). Daniel, as Koryun witnesses, knew the Armenians and their language—Armenian very well, but it was not necessary for him to know of the *arams* (արամ-ներ) as well i. e. about *արամեացիներ* (aramesiner), so he might have read the homonymous words in the way known to him *արամյան* (aramian), i. e. *հայկական* (Armenian). A similar

case is the ambiguous name word Aram used in Armenian. The first is the name Aram, the head of a tribe from which Արամյան (Aramian) is derived, and on the other hand արամեացիներ (Arameatsiner) and then ասորիներ (Assyrians). Koryun writes in his history: Mesrop "...got to the land of Aram", which means Asorik (Assyria).

While admitting this assumption of Hr. Atjarian, however, we cannot refuse to consider another version. M. Abegian (6, 11, 16) and H. Manandian (16, 258, 259), having studied in detail what Koryun, M. Khorenatsi and Gh. Parpetsi have said about the Danielian characters, conclude that they were not the alphabet of the Armenian language. At the same time they think that before Mesrop the Assyrian missionaries might possibly have tried to create Armenian letters using the alphabets of other languages, and that their attempt might have failed. Thus one may suppose that in the fourth century, after adopting Christianity, a certain Assyrian missionary (or missionaries) may have tried to create an alphabet for the Armenian language and that the attempt must have failed. As H. Manandian writes, "the alphabet created by them was incomplete and inapplicable" (16, 259). However, the result of that attempt, i. e. "the incomplete and inapplicable" alphabet contrived for the Armenian language, was recorded in a

hand-written register containing the list of the alphabets as "the signs of the Armenian language". This inadequate alphabet was what Daniel had found. Thus, of the existing theories concerning the Danielian signs, we think only two of them feasible: a) as the result of a misunderstanding, **արամեական** (Arameakan) was taken for **արամյան** (Aramian) and the **արամեական** (aramaikan) alphabet was considered to be Armenian. b) the Danielian characters were the abortive attempt of an Assyrian missionary to fashion an Armenian alphabet.

8

The first failure, through the false estimate of the Danielian signs, did not disappoint Mesrop. Giving up those signs, he again became anxious for some time. Then he decided to go to the educational and scientific centres of the day to do research and realize the creation of the alphabet. Taking a group of young men, he started for Edessa, which was one of these cultural centres. He kept a number of these men in Edessa with him, and sent the rest to Samosata to study Greek writing. Then he did some studies with the help of the well-informed people in the famous Edessan chancery, where a tremendous amount of literature was kept. Here, making use of different sources, he studied the alphabets of various languages, acquainted himself with their

structure, the forms of the letters, the principles of writing, the knowledge of which was necessary to create characters. After he had properly acquainted himself with the existing alphabets, he started to create the Armenian letters, following the best principles of writing.

The creation of the Armenian letters in Edessa is represented in the following way by Koryun: "Thus he experienced many tribulations in order to serve his nation. And God the All-Bountiful finally granted him that good fortune; for with his holy hand he became the father of new and wonderful offsprings—letters of the Armenian language, and then and there quickly designed, named, determined their order and devised the syllabication" (279). It then means that it was in Edessa that Mesrop invented, determined the order and named the Armenian letters created by him-with his hand. Khorenatsi attributes Koryun's words "with his holy hand" to "God the All-Bountiful" and explains the creation of the letters in the following way. "And (for Mesrop) it was neither a dream in sleep nor a vision in wakefulness. But there appeared in the sanctum of his heart before his mind's eye a right hand writing on a stone, so that the traces of the lines remained on the stone as if in snow. And not only did it appear but also the details of all the letters accumulated in his mind as if on a plate" (404). This passage is commented on by Khorenatsi himself and

by later writers as God's immediate gift to Mesrop. It is interpreted in the same way by modern pious scholars as well. But what Khorenatsi has related can be explained on quite scientific grounds, as, for example, St. Malkhasian does. "Mesrop sat with his eyes fixed on the parchment on which the experimental alphabet was written. He gazed at this parchment and at his hand on it, deep in thought. Then, awakening, he looked up and saw another hand in the dark, which was writing on a slab. In reality he saw the parchment in front of him, with the letters on it, and his own hand: this is a usual visual reflex, which we have seen a hundred times" (2, 523). In principle, we are apt to explain this "apparition" as a psycho-physiological phenomenon, not as a mirage, but as a creative invention. If Mesrop had already drawn the letters on the parchment, he had nothing else to do, and his spiritual (creative) sufferings were over. Thus one must suppose that Mesrop had been practising drawing for many days, comparing this or that letter drawn by him with the corresponding letter in the Greek or Assyrian alphabet, and when he found some similarity or simply did not like it he erased it and wrote a new one. Then, deep in thought, he imagined the forms of the letters he had erased, and drew new forms in his mind, entirely concentrated on what he was doing. It was a process of inward, spiritual travail during which he imagined the form

of a letter. "It was neither a dream in sleep nor a vision in wakefulness but something which he saw with his mind's eye". Of course, such an apparition for the pious Mesrop must have been God's hand, whereas in "reality" it was the product of a tired mind, a creative invention. Such cases are not rare in the history of science and art. Just such a phenomenon is what Hr. Atjarian has presented concerning the etymology of the name Seda¹. Thus what Mesrop had seen must have resulted from some such psychological process which he, when relating, had probably represented as a wonder of God.

A question is bound to arise from this explanation. Those who copied out Khorenatsi's history, as we have said, have added to the story of that

¹ "I have thought about the origin of this name for years and have not found a solution. It **has** often happened to me that when searching for the origin of a word and not finding it my thought has worked independently and all of a sudden it has given me the answer. It was like this in this case. Last year on June 22nd while going from Moscow to Leningrad in the dead of night, the origin of the name Seda was written before my eyes. It was the feminine of the Arabic *seide* "master". (Hr. Atjarian, Armenian Stock Dictionary, vol. 4, 1979, p. 654).

vision the vowels ա, ե, է, ը, ի, ո, լ but those who have published the critical text have stated that it was a later introduction and have excluded it from the text. Thus one has to ask what letter (or letters) appeared in Mesrop's "mind's eye". Since we have no facts, we have to resort to suppositions. It is natural to think that only one letter—that is the letter Ա was drawn in his mind. We have to assume this because it is impossible that all the letters or even a few letters should have been drawn at the same time. All this must be assumed as a supposition to explain the "wonder" told by Khorenatsi.

As it is assumed in Armenology, in creating the Armenian alphabet the starting point for Mesrop was the Greek alphabet, though he had studied many alphabets. He was exercising some experiments in drawing, including the creative activity of his mind. However, when he did not like the forms he had drawn he began to imagine different drawings and make a choice. It is natural that during this technical and mental work, he had to begin with the first letter. We cannot think that he might have begun with the last or the middle letter of the alphabet, just because the first letter Ա of the alphabet describes at least partially the general structure and the style of the letters. The forms of the letters of the Mesropian alphabet represent a certain system, and that system represents certain principles of drawing, many of which had general

characteristics found in the letter *u*. On this the foundations were laid, all he had to do was to “re-shape” the letters of the Greek and other alphabets according to this principle. It was mainly technical drawing work. As an example we can take the second letter beta (β) of the Greek alphabet. There is first the perpendicular. Then let us open the circles and make the lower open circle into a straight pinion and we come up with the Mesropian *բ*. In this way we can derive the other letters. What is of importance here is that Mesrop compared the first letter drawn by him with the corresponding Greek letter and found some varying features, and by these features he found the principles which guided him in shaping his letters. Since the Greek alphabet and its letters were a starting point for Mesrop, one can say that reshaping them on the same principles he made Armenian characters. But such an approach would have been very simple. Greek alphabet and its letters were only a starting point and shaping our letters is the result of creative work. When our scientists try to find the “prototypes” of the Armenian (Mesropian) letters, i. e. those letters of the Greek alphabet and, in certain cases, of other alphabets as well, by reshaping which Mesrop made **this or that Armenian letter** it is only the analytic work of a scholar. We have at hand the alphabet made by Mesrop with its letters and its starting point—the Greek alphabet with its letters. **Comparing the**

letters of the two alphabets we find the distinguishing features and removing them we try to identify the result with the starting point and associate this or that letter of Armenian with the same Greek "prototype" and find the ways and the system of the "alterations". But Mesrop did just the contrary. He had the original—the prototypes—and tried to make something different from them. As the results show, his creative work was a great success. Nevertheless, if we are talking of the principles and the system of reshaping the Greek letters, we should not in any sense conclude that Mesrop had imitated or taken the corresponding letter in Greek with some changes; we have, rather, to understand that taking as a starting point a Greek letter (or Assyrian, Pahlavi and so on) he had made a corresponding Armenian letter different from the original. We have to proceed in this way because our work is the scientist's analytic comparative work of finding *similarities* and *generalities*, whereas Mesrop's work was the creative task of inventing *the new*, *the different* and *the original*. In any case, even if we find real similarities between the letters of the Mesropian alphabet and those of another language, it is not at all strange. It does not mean that he imitated or copied or adopted the letter of a foreign alphabet with changes. What is more important is that Mesrop had undertaken the difficult task of

creating Armenian letters. He had studied many alphabets and the peculiarities of their letters, and, although when he began to draw the Armenian letters, he might, of course, have chosen some prototypes, the main thing was to make new, original letters unlike their "prototypes" but according to his principles. The prototypes in this case helped him give his letters nonidentical forms. Therefore when we speak of the originality of the Mesropian letters and at the same time admit that this or that letter in Armenian represents "reshapings" of a Greek letter according to certain principles, this must be understood in the following way: the form of a letter in the Mesropian alphabet displays differences from the Greek, and this in turn means that Mesrop had not created his alphabet in a vacuum. He had made use of the alphabets he knew well but *he had created an original alphabet*. We think this was the essence of his creative research and practical work and the results we have at hand prove that these were a great success.

Thus in Edessa Mesrop created his alphabet, arranged the letters in succession in it, and gave names to them. He finished his work with this in Edessa and left for Samosata. We shall not discuss the arrangement of the letters in the alphabet, nor their concrete forms for the present: instead, let us see why he went to Samosata and what he did there.

Koryun relates the following about Mesrop's activity in Samosata: "...he went... to the city of **Samosata**, where he was accorded great honors by the Bishop and the Church. He found there in the same city, a Hellenic scribe, named **Ropanos**, by whose hands all the variations of the letters, thin and heavy strokes, long and short, the single letters as well as the diphthongs were devised, after which he proceeded with translations, with the help of two of his pupils, **Hovhan**, from the province of **Ekeghiats**, and **Hovsep** from the House of **Baghan**. And thus began the translation of the Bible first, the Proverbs of Solomon, which begins with the exhortation to seek wisdom..." (279). Armenologists have put forward different hypotheses concerning certain assumptions in this history.

The first question is, why did Mesrop go to Hropanos, who was the latter, and what did he do? "He found Hropanos, a scribe of Hellenic writing". In old Armenia scribes were those who imitated, i. e. copied, those who were good at writing, although this word also meant "secretary" as well as "painter" (in rare cases). Describing Mesrop's trip to Edessa, **Khorenatsi** relates that Mesrop asked the chief of the chancery, the speaker **Plato**, for help. The latter was willing to help but was unable to, and confessed his inability. **Plato**, however, advised

Mesrop to find Epiphani who had lived in Edessa earlier. He had been Plato's teacher, an erudite scientist. From the town bishop Mesrop learned where Epiphani was: he found out too that Epiphani had died but he had a pupil named Hropanos who, according to Khorenatsi, lived in Samos. Khorenatsi records various details concerning Epiphani, whom he considered to be a great scientist, and praises Hropanos as the pupil of that great scientist. All the same he represents Hropanos as a scribe of Greek scripture, i. e. a person famous for the art of calligraphy, from whom Mesrop obtained no help either. Thus Hropanos was a mere scribe. Hr. Atjarian quite convincingly characterises what he did. After the alphabet was created in Edessa it was necessary to draw it beautifully and regularly. It was necessary to compile a table of the newly shaped letters, which was called a *tablet* in the ancient language; until recently it has been called a plate in the popular dialect. Mesrop, though a secretary, turns out not to have been skilled at the art of scribing or rather the art of calligraphy. There must have been flourishers and scribes in Edessa, but they were used to the sinuous and winding Assyrian letters; Mesrop therefore thought it better to go to Samosata, where, as we saw, there was a famous Greek school, in order to find a Greek calligrapher and have a decent tablet drawn (14, 122—123). The same explanation concerning what Hropanos did

is given by M. Abeghian. Taking into account the attribute "scientist" used by Khorenatsi, they express the opinion that Hropanos was a famous grammarian and a linguist of his time who helped Mesrop to characterize the letters created by himself; in other words, they believe that Mesrop learned phonetics and grammar from him and became our first phonetician and linguist. The basis for such a supposition, as well as for other hypotheses, is the part in Koryun's history of Samosata which reads: "the best choice of fine and massive, short and long, separate and double letters quite exemplary and desirable". St. Nazarian, M. Markwart, G. Sevak and others identify the terms of this sentence with those used in the translation of Dionysius's grammar, i. e. the names fine and massive, short and long correspond to the short and long vowels, the double corresponds to the doubling consonants, hence the separate, non-double correspondence. Such an interpretation does not correspond to what Koryun has written, because:

a) Koryun and Khorenatsi call Hropanos a scribe and a scribe means a copyist, not a grammarian.

b) Koryun used the terms of the pre-Hellenic period, whereas in the translation of Dionysius's grammar Hellenic terms are used. It has been proved that the pre-Hellenic terms and those of the Hellenists are not the same; thus one cannot iden-

tify Koryun's terms with those used in the translation of Dionysius's grammar.

c) The supporters of this version make a point of the coincidence of the words *short, long, double*; however, this must not be taken as the identification of the concepts expressed by them. The Armenian language did not have *short* and *long* vowels, and Mesrop made neither different letters nor any additional signs to show the shortness or the length of the vowels. This means that there was no need for him to distinguish between short and long vowels in his "phonetic arrangement". He was not translating Greek grammar. If he had been he would have had to translate what was written about *short* and *long* vowels in the Greek original and write that the long vowels were *ι* and the Greek *ω*, like, for instance, the translator of Dionysius.

d) Describing Mesrop's activity, Koryun writes definitely that the Armenian alphabet was created in Edessa, where Mesrop gave names to the letters *ա ի բ* (aib), *բ ե ն* (ben), *գ ի մ* (gim) and so on and arranged them in alphabetical order. If it were necessary for Mesrop to learn grammar and arrange the Armenian sounds, he must have done so before creating the alphabet, because the first stage of his activity was concerned with phonetics. While using the Danielian Characters he had already to concern himself with the question of which Armenian sounds had no letters in the Danielian alphabet, i. e., he

had to begin his work with the study of the sounds of Armenian.

All this shows that Hropanos was only a scribe, that is, a calligraphist, and that Mesrop's task in Samosata was not to arrange the sounds but to have the letters written calligraphically as has been explained by M. Abeghian, St. Malkhasian and others. From this we can conclude that the terms mentioned by Koryun concern the forms of the letters. Out of those three terms the first two are very clear: "*fine* and *massive*" (i. e. broad) are the lines of the letters, "*short* and *long*" are the short and long lines of the letters, for example, the perpendiculars of the letter *Ա* are long, but the righthand pinion is short, the perpendicular of *Բ* is long, the upper downright line and the middle horizontal line are short, and so on. What causes difficulty is the last pair of terms "separate and double". All the letters in the Mesropian alphabet are separate letters and are written separately. There are no two signs or joined letters in the alphabet and this fact makes it difficult to explain the meaning of the term "double". Hr. Atjarian explains the meaning of "double" by the old meaning of "to repeat oneself", that is, "to fold, to roll"; therefore he calls doubled letters those having foldings or rollings (e. g. *Թ*, *ժ*, *Ձ*, *Ղ*). We do not think this probable because all the letters in the Mesropian alphabet have certain foldings (cf. *Բ*, *Ր*, *Ս*, *Դ* and so on). M. Abeghian

explains *double* in the following way: "two-sign letters, two letters linked and written together". As an example he gives the letter *ՈԻ*; this is quite accurate. But explaining it in this way, he assumes that Mesrop made the letter *ՈԻ* in Samosata and that, under the influence of Hropanos, he followed Greek writing. Greek had the two-sign letter *ou* for the sound *ՈԻ* (Latin U). This version, however, contradicts M. Abeghian's other version. He believes that Mesrop made the Armenian alphabet in Edessa, as Koryun suggests, and that besides this it was in Edessa, that he had composed the first spelling manual. One cannot assume that Mesrop made letters for all the sounds in Armenian and left out the sound *ՈԻ*, then made the first reader without having made a written sign for that sound. However, what is of importance for us in M. Abeghian's explanation is the fact that he calls the two-sign letter *ՈԻ double*. Moreover, this explanation helps us to interpret Koryun's terms *separate* and *double*. Nobody can deny that the Mesropian *ՈԻ* is double, i. e. it is a two-sign letter. But why did Mesrop choose to link two characters for the simple sound *ՈԻ* (u) when he was guided by the principle of one letter for one sound in creating his alphabet? The answer is very simple: under the influence of the Greek language. But why did Greek have a two-sign letter for the vowel *ՈԻ*? This is known from the history of Greek. The two-sign

Greek *ov* had been a diphthong in old times and was pronounced as *ou* (ou) and that is why it was written by the combination of the vowels *o* and *u*. In Mesropian times, this character was already read as the simple vowel *,u* but in grammar it was considered a diphthong. Even in present-day Greek textbooks, *ov* is spoken about as a diphthong which subsequently became a monophthong. Mesrop. who had received a Greek education and knew Greek grammar, was naturally guided by Greek grammar while making letters for the sounds of Armenian. Consequently, due to the influence of the grammar of the period, he called the Armenian *ոհ* a diphthong and created a two-sign letter for it. Thus on the basis of M. A-beghian's quite correct explanation according to which Koryun's *double* is the *ու*, and taking into account what we have said about *ու*, we think that the term *double* means a combination of two letters, as the diphthongs were. Hence we can say that the former of Koryun's terms—*separate* and *double*—refers to the letters of the alphabet which are really separately written, single letters; the latter—*double*—are the diphthongs representing the combinations of two letters (*հա, ուա, լո, ուի, աւ, եւ, իւ, այ, ոյ*).

A question is bound to arise: was it necessary to show the letter combinations expressing the diphthongs with the letters of his alphabet? Cannot one assume that Mesrop invented the letters of his alpha-

bet by the principle of one letter for one sound, which meant that he made letters not only for the consonants but also for the vowels, and then the diphthongs could have been written by the corresponding vowels too? The writing of diphthongs, created by Mesrop, to be discussed in detail below, is rather a complicated and at the same time a well worked out scientific system, so without that writing system it was impossible to write Armenian, especially to distinguish between the so-called simple syllables (containing one vowel) and the diphthongal syllables. Let us adduce an example to show this: the word **որդի** (son) is a two-syllable word (**որ-դի**)—the syllabic of each is a simple vowel. From this word we have the derivative **որդիալ** in which we get the diphthong **իա** (ia) by the combination of the vowels. Thus if Mesrop had written that word as we have (**որդիալ**), the letter combination **իա** of that word would have been identified with the letter combination in the words **միալ**, **միա-նալ** and the like, in which the vowels **ի** and **ա** are not diphthongs, but are pronounced as a full vowel and constitute two syllables (**մի-ալ**, **մի-ա-նալ**). To distinguish between these two letter combinations and to express the phonetic peculiarities of the syllables, Mesrop used a clever device. He used the letter combination **իա** for the diphthong **իա** (**որդիալ**) and the letter combination **իա** for **ի-ա**. That besides making the letters, the creation of a system of

writing the diphthongs was really necessary, is confirmed by the text-books of foreign languages, in which the teaching of the alphabet and the sounds is immediately followed by the teaching of the writing and the pronunciation of the diphthongs. Thus the passage in Koryun's book concerning the forms of the letters should be understood and interpreted in the following way: "Completely forming and adjusting the finer and thicker (=comparatively thin and thick), the short and the long (lines), the separate and the double (=separate letters and letter combinations, that is, the diphthongs) of the letters..." This means that Mesrop made the letters of his alphabet with a definite form of thick and thin, long and short lines, as well as the letter combinations representing the diphthongs, so that Hropanos might write them calligraphically and in big letters on a canvas or on a large parchment. This was necessary for a very simple reason: Mesrop, of course, *had created and written down the letters* in their alphabetical order, their names, as well as the letter combinations of the diphthongs in Edessa, and written them on sheets of parchment, most probably not very artistically. He had to have all this written in big characters and "nicely" (like slogans nowadays) to show those who would meet him. Thus he found the calligraphist Hropanos who wrote not only the characters but also the first sentence of the Armen-

ian translation of the Book of Proverbs. After that Mesrop had nothing else to do in Samosata. Taking some papers from the town bishop (perhaps instructions) he returned to Edessa together with his pupils and went to the Bishop of Assyria, showing the alphabet he had created to him and others who knew him. The bishops and churches praised him highly and, then receiving greeting letters from them he took leave of them all and started with his pupils for his fatherland.

10

Mesrop was returning home victoriously. His first attempt in his native land had failed and he had been obliged to leave for other places to create the Armenian letters. He had already done that work: he had made the Armenian letters in the form he had imagined, had adjusted them, and had had a fair copy made by the scribe Hropanos. He had also had the first sentence of the Book of Proverbs written with the letters he had created: "to realise wisdom and advice, to accept the words of a genius". He was returning to his motherland with the writings gained through sufferings, on the 6th year (405) of the reign of Vramshapouh, with the consciousness of the man who was bringing an extinguishable light for his people. Talking of his return, Koryun contrasts him with Moses, who was

sad when descending from Mount Sinai "because of the sinful people", whereas Mesrop was not only resilient but full of delight. "...filled with spiritual consolation, he was confident of the eagerness of those who were to be the recipients, and in anticipation of the joy of the recipients, the very hostelries on his road appeared as receivers of his gifts" (280). The people really received him with great joy and enthusiasm. As Koryun relates, when the King and the Patriarch were informed of Mesrop's return"... they followed by the entire assemblage of noble courtiers and a throng, came outside the city and met the blessed one on the bank of the River Rah" (281). With songs of joy and words of praise the greeters led Mesrop to the capital (Vagharshapat) and commemorated that event with great festivities. Thus the Armenian letters had already been created and their perfection proved in practice by the translation of the passage from the Book of Proverbs. Now it was necessary to found Armenian schools, to teach children to read and write Armenian, to train educated youth and at the same time to continue the translation work which Mesrop had begun in Samosata. Mesrop undertook this patriotic activity together with his pupils. But he did not remain in the capital. Taking leave of the king, he departed for the provinces of Marats (according to the studies of Armenologists to the province of Paitakaran in Armenia) and laid the

foundation of his enlightening activity. On the one hand, he was teaching the youth, on the other, he was preaching. Sahak the Patriarch, in his turn, was doing the same in the capital and in Airarat province. When he had gained tangible results in the province of the Medians when he and his assistants had made the youth "intelligible, eloquent, educated, and informed of godly wisdom... they became immersed in the laws and commandments..." (281). He returned to Vagharshapat. Here he and Sahak the Patriarch devoted themselves to translating and teaching. Koryun enthusiastically tells that thanks to them the prophet Moses and the apostle Paul began "speaking Armenian" and then he adds: "What heart-warming joy existed there thenceforward, and what a pleasant scene for the eyes! For a land which had not known even the name of the region where all those wonderful divine acts had been performed, soon learned all the things that were, not only those that had transpired in time, but that of the eternity which had preceded, and those that had come later, the beginning and the end and all the divine traditions" (282). Indeed a wonderful state. A nation that had been professing Christianity for about a hundred years but was listening to Assyrian and Greek preachers in churches in Assyrian and Greek and had understood nothing, a people that had no letters to write in their own language, could now listen to the words

of the prophet Moses and the apostle Paul, to the history of creation and all the divine traditions in their mother tongue. The youth were learning the alphabet and writing in their mother tongue and becoming enlisted agents of the great enlightening activity. This first stage, that is, Mesrop's return from Edessa and his leaving for the regions of the Medians and his return once more to Vagharshapat, was, as a matter of fact, a preparatory—experimental period during which not only the practical value and perfection of the Armenian letters were tested, but also how Sahak's and Mesrop's preaching and enlightening activity had been received by the masses at large even in a province like Paitakaran, which Koryun calls "the savage regions of the Medians" and describes it as a country whose people have "devilish, satanic, and fiendish character" and speak "very crude, corrupt, and harsh language". Koryun has in mind that experimental-preparatory activity when he writes. "And as they became certain that things were firmly established, they were emboldened even more in gathering more pupils for the newly discovered learning, so as to instruct, educate, and train for preaching illiterate men" (282). It is said clearly: the preparatory activity had been a great success. Mesrop and Sahak had been convinced of the fruitfulness of their work and, inspired by it, they began to widen the scope of their activities. The people were inspired too, and

the striving for knowledge filled everybody to such an extent that "On their part they arose and came in large numbers from all parts and provinces of Armenia to the (newly) opened fountain of divine knowledge. For in the provinces of Airarat at the seat of kings and patriarchs, there gushed forth for the Armenians a grace of God's commandments" (283). It was here in the province of Airarat that Mesrop and Sahak founded the first Armenian vardpetian—the theological school or seminary. Mesrop and Sahak, as Koryun tells, taught the courtiers as well, "together with the entire azata-goond banak" (i. e. the King's army).

11

In Paitakaran and Airarat the work of enlightenment (education and translation) had been established on a sound basis, Mesrop had trained successors in Paitakaran and Vagharshapat. This was a matter of great importance but it did not satisfy Mesrop. Still in the early stage of his preaching he was concerned about the education of his people and naturally that anxiety did not leave him now. Thus having stayed in Vagharshapat for a certain time, he got the king's and the Patriarch's permission to carry on his enlightening and preaching activity in the provinces and together with his assistants, of whom Koryun mentions only two

(Tirair Khordzenaisi and Moushe Tarontsi), he went to the province of Goghin and settled in his former parish. Here too his activity was very fruitful. "In all the towns of the province he established orders of monks", then left for Siunik and "filled the region of Siunik with monastic orders". After some time it occurred to Mesrop to lay the foundation of writing in Georgia, which was on friendly terms with Armenia. Koryun relates the following concerning this: "...the beloved of Christ... by the grace of God undertook to create an alphabet for the Georgian language. He wrote, arranged, and put it in order, and taking a few of his pupils, arrived in the regions of Georgia. And he went and presented himself to King Bakour, and the bishop of the land Moses.

He placed his skill at their disposal, advised and urged them, and they consented to do what he requested. And he found a Georgian translator by the name of Jagha, a literate and devout man. The Georgian King then ordered that youths be gathered from various parts and provinces of his realm and brought to the Vardapet. Taking them he put them through the forge of education, and with spiritual love and energy he removed (from them) the purulent uncleanness of the worship of spirits and false idols" (285).

Having accomplished this mission successfully, Mesrop returned to Vagharshapat, leaving soon

after to visit the places in which he had undertaken educational work in order to "revitalize renovate and confirm" the work initiated by him.

Confirming that in the Eastern provinces of Armenia the undertaking was progressing well, "he then thought of the other half of the Armenian nation, which was under the rule of the King of the Horoms" (286). Together with a group of his pupils he left for Western Armenia. The commander-in-chief of the part of Armenia under Greece, Anatolis, received Mesrop with honour, but when he learned about his intention to found Armenian schools, he made a report to the emperor Theodosius about it. The emperor guaranteed permission and at the same time commanded that he be given the title of Acoameti (vigilant, watchful person). Mesrop went to the town of Militene with his group of pupils and introduced them to the bishop, appointing one of them supervisor. Leaving some of the pupils there, he took the rest as well as Bishop Gint of Derjan, and started for Constantinople. Here he presented himself to the Emperor and Empress and the royal bishop. "It was ordered that (Mesrop) be honored in the capital city for a definite period with the same living accommodations accorded to the church, the court, and the excellent nobles of the city" (287). Here Mesrop enjoyed great honour, and told the Emperor about his Emperor's *sacra rescripta* (decrees) to gather youths in the part of

Armenia under Byzantine rule for the purpose of instruction, as well as to wage a struggle against the Borboritons. Reaching his objective (that is—Antiok), he produced the imperial decrees to the commander in-chief Anatolis, sent messengers to the provinces to gather children, and had stipends given them to start their education. At the same time he began an ardent fight against sectarianism. “...he undertook to examine the uncouth and stubborn sect of the Borboritons. And when he found no other way to rectify them, he began to use the misery-inflicting stick, with very severe chastisements, imprisonments, tortures, fetters. And when even then they remained deprived of salvation, branded, smeared in soot, and subjected to various indignities, they were driven out of the land” (288) it is clearly stated the sectarians underwent different punishments and were expelled. Thus, here too Mesrop put the education work in order, at the same time concerning himself with the study of church father’s books, by means of which he “further deepened his knowledge of the doctrine and was filled with all goodness” (288).

According to what Koryun relates, while Mesrop was there, a man named Benjamin, Albanian* by nationality, came to Mesrop. At his request and with

* In Armenian—Aghvan.

his help Mesrop created an alphabet for the Aghvans too, then appointed two of his pupils Yenovk and Danan overseers for the faithful and returned to Vagharshapat. Here he met the King and the Patriarch, telling them about his long travels and about what he had achieved. Staying here for a few days, he again started a tour: this time to Aghvank. Reaching the capital of that country, he met the King and the Bishop of the Aghvans and told them why he had come there. There too his suggestion was willingly accepted, and the king and the Bishop... "ordered that a large number of youths be gathered from provinces and places in the realm and to open schools in suitable places to make provisions for their livelihood" (289). Having arranged all this, the Aghvan bishop Jeremiah began to translate the Holy Bible, and Mesrop went to the "region of Baghasakan" of Aghvank, having concerned himself with founding the Aghvan written culture here for some time he again returned to their capital, appointed overseers from some of his Aghvan pupils, and left for Georgia. During that journey he visited the Gardmank which was then considered the territory of Aghvank. He was met by the ruler of the Gardmank whose name was Khourts, who welcomed him for some time, became his pupil and then saw him off to Georgia. The Georgian king Ardzugh (Archil) received Mesrop with honour too. Koryun tells that the king Ardzugh "...caused learn-

ing to progress and flourish"; Mesrop went to different places, met his pupils. Then he also went to Dashirk, the ruler of which, Ashusha "placed himself along with his entire province under his disposal, and the dissemination of his doctrine was no less successful than in other provinces" (290). Entrusting the matter of teaching in Dashirk to the Bishop Samuel, Mesrop returned to Vagharshapat to Sahak and told him what he had done.

12

While Mesrop was travelling about the provinces of Armenia, and touring Aghvank and Georgia, Sahak the Patriarch was busy with translations. Coming to Vagharshapat, Mesrop joined Sahak, and they both went on developing the written culture. "...the blessed ones turned their attention to the improvement and refinement of the literature of their nation" (290). At that time Mesrop and Sahak sent two of their pupils, Eznik Koghbatsi and Hovsep Pagnatsi, to Edessa "for the purpose of translating and writing down the traditions of the church fathers from Syriac to Armenian" (291). Eznik and Hovsep fulfilled their mission, sent the results to Sahak and Mesrop, then went to the region of the Greeks where, mastering the Greek language, they "became proficient translators from the Greek language". After some time Koryun himself and Hov-

sep Ghevondes came to Constantinople and joined Eznik and Hovsep, and they all concerned themselves with translation. They translated some ecclesiastical books, and then the selected Greek copy of the Holy Bible (the so-called "translation of the seventy") as well as the writings of the church fathers. They returned to Armenia with the canons of the ecumenical church council meetings of Nicaea in 425 and of Ephesus in 431.

Mesrop and Sahak continued their literary activity and translations. After Eznik and the others had returned, Sahak together with Eznik reviewed, corrected and edited "the former random, hurriedly done translation" of the Holy Bible, comparing it with the newly brought Greek "authentic copy". They also translated many commentaries of the Bible.

Mesrop evidently busied himself more with reading and independent literary work. As Koryun notes, Mesrop, "with his excellent erudition began to prepare diverse, easily understood and gracious sermons, full of the light and essence of the prophetic books and illustrations of true evangelical faith" (292). This evidence is a direct assertion that Mesrop really concerned himself with writing his own works as well. Armenologists hold that the Penitence Canticles, "Speeches Often Made" (or at least part of it) and the Epistle to the Bishop Prokgh are his works.

As Koryun relates, though the two "saintly fathers" were busy with literary translations, Mesrop found time now and again to visit the schools and monasteries founded by him in the provinces, helping them where necessary. In the last years of Mesrop's life the scope of his activity was perhaps restricted to a certain extent for political and religious reasons. It is known that in 428 the Persian empire abolished the Armenian kingdom and, de-throning Sahak the Patriarch, appointed an Assyrian Patriarch Surmak in his place. Thus both the royal dynasty of the Arshakunis and the patriarchal "dynasty" of the Partevs were put to an end. It is natural that Surmak, who was a rival of Sahak, and the two Assyrian patriarchs following him, Shmuel and Brkisho, would not view Sahak and Mesrop favourably. It was under these conditions that Mesrop had evidently to devote himself largely to literary work or rather to confine himself to it, only from time to time visiting this or that cloister, monastery, or the hermits living in the mountains. "And again", Koryun writes "he established many and countless groups of monks in inhabited as well as in uninhabited places, countless groups in lowlands, in mountains, in caves, and in cloisters. From time to time he showed himself as an example to them. From all the monasteries he took with him a few pupils to retire into the mountains and to live in caves" (293). In the meanwhile, he and

Sahak were fighting against sectarianism, "persecuting the sectarians and expelling them from the country".

And involved in this activity did Sahak and Mesrop die. Sahak died in 439 on September 7, and Mesrop died six months later, in 440 on February 17 in Vagharshapat. He was buried in Oshakan with great ceremony. Three years later Vahan Amattouni erected a cathedral on his grave. Mashtots's grave has been preserved to this day in the altar under the cathedral pulpit in the village of Oshakan. For the people his grave, which has been called "the translator's grave", has been a holy place for centuries.

13

Before considering the Mesropian alphabet and orthography, it is necessary to dwell at some length upon Mesrop's activity as described in Koryun's "The life of Mashtots". Both in the introductory part and in the lengthy "epilogue" Koryun emphasizes Mesrop's religious-preaching activity at the same time as his pedagogical-enlightening activity (the founding of schools, training teachers and so on). The reason is quite clear: impeded by the attitude and Iranian Christian church as well as by the policy of the Assyrian leaders of the Armenian church in the last decade of Mesrop's life, Koryun

had to lay stress on Mesrop's religious activity first of all in order to win over the leaders of the Assyrian and Greek churches. Nevertheless Koryun manages to give a very complete picture of Mesrop's secular activity. That activity is represented, again with a religious colouring, in the following *summary*: "*And thus all over Armenia, Georgia and Albania, throughout his lifetime, in summer and winter, night and day, fearless and without hesitation, he bore, with his evangelical and upright life, the name of Jesus the Saviour of all before kings, princes, and all the pagans, and with no contradiction from opponents*" (292) (underlined by us—E. A.). What is of special interest in this passage is that Koryun especially emphasizes that Mesrop was resisted by neither kings and princes nor pagans and opponents. That pagans might have opposed him stands to reason and is even natural, but why should kings and princes have opposed him? As far as Armenia, Georgia and Aghvank are concerned, the kings and princes of these countries had no reason to create any obstacles, because Christianity had been proclaimed as the official religion in these countries in the previous century, and this was what Mesrop was preaching. And ultimately who were the opponents? Throughout the whole book Koryun emphasizes that Mesrop was honourably met everywhere: by the Armenian king and Patriarch and the princes; even by the Assyrian bishops; by the commander-in-chief

Anatolis; the Byzantine emperor; monks of high rank; the king and Patriarch of Georgia, and the king, princes and clergymen of Aghvank. Not mentioning even the least obstacle to Mesrop's activity anywhere in the book, he suddenly remembers the opponents. One may, of course, assume that Koryun has in mind the Assyrian bishops of Armenia and the Persian rulers and their agents. Indeed, from the thirties of that century the policy of the Persian court had changed not only in Armenia but also in Iran. It is known that in the 20s and 30s of the fifth century persecutions began against Christianity in Iran, and in the forties the persecution of the Persian court began against Armenian Christianity, that is, at the time when Koryun was writing his book. We cannot but suppose that what Koryun has written is the direct echo of these developments. In our opinion it might be that those events played some role, but it is not the main thing. Koryun is speaking about Mesrop's opponents, but he was already dead and not aware of the Persian persecutions of the forties. Moreover, Koryun's remark does not refer to the thirties, since he is speaking about Mesrop's activity in Armenia, Georgia and in Aghvank. So who were the opponents and why had they become opponents?

This question is answered by Koryun himself. In general, when recounting even Mesrop's pedagogical-enlightening activity, Koryun is restrained and

does not accentuate it. Speaking of his tours, Koryun writes that he persecuted heathens, made them Christians, trained monks and appointed his pupils overseers to continue the work he had started. All Armenologists recognize that Mesrop's main task was to teach, to found schools and make his already trained pupils teachers and appoint them overseers. The founding of monasteries and the training of monks were principally for this same teaching purpose. For as we know from history, it was the monasteries that were the main sources of our literature. Even the medieval universities were attached to them.

Thus Koryun always emphasizes Mesrop's preaching, thereby concealing his secular purpose. However, his reserve and religious pathos expire and, though very superficially, he represents Mesrop's activity from quite a different angle. Here is the relevant casual remark: *"And he saved many who had been imprisoned and in chains by wresting them away from the hands of tyrants by the mighty power of Christ, and he tore up many inequitable contracts and through the doctrine of consolation gave to many who were in mourning and in despair, expectation and hope in the appearance of the glory of Almighty God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and in general he changed them all by bringing them under God's law"* (293) (underlined by us—E. A.). Though this passage is very brief,

it becomes clear that Mesrop was not only a teacher and a preacher of religion, but also an active social worker and a political figure. He liberated those who had been imprisoned and in chains, by wresting them away from the hands of tyrants, he tore up inequitable contracts and consoled those who were in mourning and in despair. All this shows that he fought against violence and oppression to establish justice and well-being wherever he had been. That aspect of his activity is not at all obscured by the fact that, in Koryun's word, he did all this "by the mighty power of Christ", inspiring belief and hope for the life beyond. This brief remark of Koryun throws light also on the question why Mesrop, who had a firm position at court and, as a military man, was respected and loved by his colleagues, rejected his post and devoted himself to asceticism. Armenologists have put forward many suppositions concerning this rejection; the most widely accepted is that Mesrop was born with a love for literature and while working in the service of the court, he used to read literature, mainly religious. The result of that reading was that the religious ideas took possession of him, and he decided to leave secular life and devote himself to asceticism.

What is correct about this supposition is that while at court Mesrop worked hard at increasing his knowledge, and according to what Koryun has written, he mastered military art and read litera-

ture. "He was well versed in secular laws, and was esteemed by his men for his mastery of the military art. While serving the princes, he, nevertheless, devoted himself eagerly to the reading of the scriptures" (275). This information, however, is not sufficient to explain his renunciation by the mystic inclination of the mind. In our opinion it would be better to explain it in the following way. Working as a royal secretary and living in the palace, then being on military service, he had a chance to see more closely the royal ways, deceits and intrigues, injustice and violence. He was already reading literature, looking for ways to change all this but, finding no way out, he relied on asceticism. But being of an active character, Mesrop was a practical man and a great thinker. The hermit's life could not satisfy him; therefore he left it and undertook preaching in Goghtn. Here he reinforced Christianity. It was while carrying out this activity that the idea of creating writing and literature in his mother tongue came to him. With this idea in mind he interrupted his activity and returned to Vagharshapat and devoted himself to that great cause. Koryun, Khorenatsi and Parpetsi write very little about Mesrop's life in the palace and what he did there, but Karapet Sasnetsi, who is considered a writer of the 12—13 centuries, in his book "Ode to the Life and Death of St. Vardapet Mesrop" describes in detail Mesrop's life while on royal service, the

corrupt court full of deceit, oppression and violence and concludes that Mesrop was not tempted by this life full of vice. Because of his irreproachable character and honest spirit he could not reconcile himself to the royal life. He left it and devoted himself to the sublime cause of supporting the miserable and the deprived" (4, 27—32). Hr. Atjarian, speaking about this and other information by Sasnetsi, writes: "All this is the result of Sasnetsi's vigour and imagination" (14, 80). We do not agree: Sasnetsi could not have invented the description of the corruption of royal life. Mesrop's escape from that corrupt life and his devotion to the support of the miserable and the deprived". We think that he had at hand some old source unknown to us, or had made use of the beliefs of the common people, or, at last, that there had been such a passage in Koryun's original which still existed in Sasnetsi's time, but was taken out later. For, the oldest manuscript of Koryun's work dates from the 14th century. Comparing what Koryun has said (how Mesrop set prisoners free, tore up the contracts and so on) with Sasnetsi's account, we think that the explanation given by us may be considered valid.

The alphabet with its letter-forms, drawn up by Mesrop. as he had Hropanos write it and made the

tablet, has not survived. Nor do we have a fifth-century manuscript by means of which we might get an idea of the shape of the Mesropian letters from original sources. It is a painful flaw. But it is compensated for by the other real data at hand, on the basis of which paleography rather exactly restores the letter forms in the Mesropian alphabet. Of paramount importance among these data are lithographic inscriptions. Armenology has inscriptions of the 5—7th centuries which represent the shapes of the letters created by Mesrop. The second source is the fragments of the manuscripts, the first (old) copy of the palimpsests¹. The oldest samples² of these two sources are the following:

1. The inscription of the Tekor cathedral, is considered our oldest manuscript, it must have been written before the last decade of the fifth century (i. e. pre 490).

2. The palimpsest copy of the binding of the parchment manuscript № 1 of Sanasarian college (= №

¹ These manuscripts are called the “twice written” as the writing on the parchment, which was used long ago was erased and something new written on top of it. By scientific means it is now possible to read the original inscription.

² We have made use of the works by Hr. Atjarian (11, 350—351). M. Abeghian (6, 5—54), K. Ghaphadarian (15, 531), A. Abrahamian (7, 80—88).

7735 of Matenadaran) and an unchanged sheet introduced into the manuscript. The old letters are read beneath the twice written letters, and the preserved sheet is clearly legible. Hr. Atjarian and K. Ghap̄adarian, having studied this old manuscript, have come to the conclusion that it represents writing of the fifth century.

3. The mosaic inscription of Mount of Olives of Jerusalem (6th century) as well as three other inscriptions found in Jerusalem (6th century).

4. The inscription on the southern wall of the church in Yeghvard (6th century).

5. The inscription on the western wall of the Hripsime cathedral written in 618.

6. The inscription of the church in Bagaran of 631.

7. The inscription of the Cathedral Zvartnots of 642—661.

8. The Alaman church inscription of 637.

9. The inscription of the St. Grigor church in Arutj of the seventies of the 7th century.

10. The inscription by the architect Todosak of the church in Athen (7th century).

To get an idea of our oldest letter-forms we represent the comparative table of the numerical writings 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10.

The following general remarks should be made concerning the shapes of the letters in this table.

1. The given inscriptions are from different places

and from different times, so the masters who have carved them are different, each having his own style, his art of carving.

2. The inscriptions are not only mere written texts of a certain content but are also ornaments on temples and churches; thus the shapes of the letters are to a certain extent conditioned by this. A more vivid example of this is given by the Tekor inscription, in which the letter **U** is rather a decoration than a letter. Taking into consideration this fact, we should disengage ourselves from the partial differences of the letter-form of the six columns and take the most general features of their drawing in order to restore the shapes of the Mesropian letters.

By this approach we can assume that the thickened part of the rightward line of the letters **Գ**, **Դ** and others in the letter-forms of the binding is a feature of the writer's handwriting and admit that the rightward horizontal lines of these letters did not have downward endings. From this point of view we shall see that the letter shapes in all the six columns in their main features represent the alphabetic standard of the letters. The only exception is the first letter of our alphabet which has four

forms: **Մ**, **Մ**, **Մ**, **Մ** The first of these

four forms as we have said, is a decoration in which the main lines of the letter are preserved (i. e. two per-

pendiculars, a rightward pinion which, however, is the end of the third perpendicular, which itself is the continuation of the rightward perpendicular. The second is

the  of the binding, the righthand per-

pendicular of which does not form one whole but is separated in the upward part of the pinion: the pinion is a thick horizontal line. In general the "wide" lines of all the letters of the binding are thicker than usual. In the Yeghvard inscription the letter *U* has a standard form with some difference: the righthand perpendicular in the upper part (almost half of it) is one thick line, the lower part is two fine continuous lines between which there is an uncarved space (in the picture blank, white). This letter's shape, with the blank space of the right perpendicular filled with one whole line, -*U*- is considered by us

the standard letter form for  made by

Mesrop. Hripsime's *U* is almost the same, but the blank space of the righthand perpendicular is full, that is, the perpendicular is divided into two fine lines, by means of which the blank space has become full. The right hand pinion here does not intersect the perpendicular yet (it is not the continuation of the inside of this perpendicular) it is quite obvious that it represents the developed shape of

the former. Lastly, the fourth form (Bagaran and Arutj) are further perfections of the former two, the inner fine line of the righthand perpendicular is a little curved, and, what is more important, intersecting the right perpendicular and running rightward it has formed the pinion. Thus the oldest, Mesropian standard form of the letter should be

considered the form  ¹.

By a comparative setting of the letter forms of the five columns one can restore the alphabetical standard of the letter forms made by Mesrop, as is accepted by the greater part of Armenologists.

The study of those letter forms enables us to reveal the common principles of drawing the Mesropian letter forms. We have represented these principles in our investigation "Mesropian Alphabet and Orthography" (9, 68—77) on the basis of a comparison with the Greek "prototypes". Now, however, we find that the structure drawing of the

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¹ A. G. Abrahamian (7, 50) considers the oldest form of  to be , a view we do not share.

Mesropian letters and its principles must be defined on the basis of those forms, in other words, that one must study the alphabet as a complete entity, independent of the Greek or Assyrian (Pahlavi and so on) alphabets. Such a study reveals the following principles of the structure of the Mesropian letters.

1. For the greater part of the Mesropian letters the main line is the perpendicular (*Ա Բ Գ Դ Ե Զ Է Ը Թ Ժ Ի Լ Խ Դ Ո Պ Ռ Ս Վ Շ Ր Ի Փ Ք*).

2. The letters consisting of two perpendiculars have a fine upper or lower curved line to connect them. To distinguish between similar connections of perpendiculars there are pinions on the right (cf. *Ա Մ Վ* as distinct from *Ս* and *Ո*).

3. The letters consisting of one perpendicular have pinions on the right (horizontal lines) or half perpendiculars connected with the main line by a curve (*Դ Ե Զ Է Ը Ի Լ Ղ Տ Ի*).

4. The closed lines connected with the perpendiculars have pinions on the right intersecting the perpendicular *Թ Ժ Գ*.

5. The letters having no perpendiculars are closed or slightly open circular lines with different lines from above or below horizontal pinions on the left or right and so on (cf. *Ձ, Մ, Ջ, Ղ, Ճ, Չ, Շ* and so on).

Almost all Armenologists concerned with the problem of the creation of the Mesropian alphabet face one problem: which alphabet and which letter forms had Mesrop altered to make his own. A detailed consideration and evaluation of the research on this problem is given by Hr. Atjarian (11, 177—277). He concludes that out of 36 letters of the Mesropian alphabet 18 (Բ, Գ, Դ, Ե, Զ, Է, Ը, Թ, Ժ, Ի, Մ, Ո, Պ, Ս, Ր, Ժ, Փ, Ք) are formed from Greek, 9 (Ժ, Լ, Ծ, Զ, Դ, Վ, Տ) from Iranian, one letter Մ from Assyrian, and that two are of Mesrop's own creation. Later on he admitted that the letters Խ, Վ, Ր were also made by Mesrop, thus from Greek prototypes 16 letters were made and 8 from Iranian ones. As to the prototypes of the other letters he is indefinite, finding it possible to relate them to Greek, Assyrian or Iranian prototypes. In the opinion of the historian A. G. Abrahamian, 20 letters of Mashtots's alphabet are of Greek origin, 3 of North Mesopotamian Aramaic origin Լ, Վ, Մ, one letter Մ from Assyrian (7, 49).

Of course the similarity of certain letters, Բ, Պ, Ե, Ր, Փ is obvious and in our opinion, we can admit that only for these several letters did Mesrop have their Greek forms in mind to make the corresponding Armenian letters. But as we have mentioned above what Mesrop did was creative

work: the form of the letter was a *creative invention*, the comparison of which with the Greek alphabet reveals certain dissimilarities. Using them as a basis, he applied principles bringing forth distinguishing features to the Greek beta and got two letters *U* and *Β*. In making the other letters Mesrop was free in his choice: the third letter of Greek is gamma Γ, against the background of which Mesrop made the Armenian *Պ*. If we admit that this letter is of Greek prototype, we have to say: he had kept the perpendicular, had lowered the righthand line to the central part of the perpendicular and had added a lefthand circle from the upper. Was it not easier to turn the upper part of *Β* and close it (to make a circle)? *Պ* is the same *Պ* with the circle open. Thus, one has to assume that Mesrop had several alphabets at his disposal, among which Greek was the leading one, and the letters made by himself, *U* then *U*, *Β* and then *U*, *Β*, *Պ*, and so on like this. That the letters made by Mesrop did serve as prototypes for the missing letters in Greek is admitted first of all by Atjarian, then by A. G. Abrahamian, A. A. Abrahamian, as well as by this author. But why limit ourselves only to these? We could adduce more examples. For instance, *Պ* (Greek had the letter delta) is the transmutation of *Պ*, *Պ* is from *Π*, *Ջ* and *Շ* are also from *Π* but *Հ* is different (it is neither from any other alphabet, nor any letter from the alphabet created by him). By transmutation of

his own-made letters, Mesrop has formed Գ from Բ, Դ from Գ, Ը from Է, Ժ from Թ, Լ from Ի, Խ from Ի, Շ from Ո, Զ from Ո, Պ from Ո, Ռ from Ր (two Ր connected together), Ղ from Լ, Ս from Ա, Վ from Ս, Տ from Ս, Ր from Տ. If that is so, then the greater part of the other letters are not transmutations of letters from this or that alphabet but creatively made letters, (except those few letters the similarity of which with the Greek prototypes is obvious).

The arrangement of the letters in his alphabet is done mainly according to the Greek order. This is proved by the fact that the letters having their corresponding letters in Greek have the same order as in Greek. All the other letters which are made from the Armenian ones created by him are placed immediately either after or before them (cf. Լ after Ի, Ը after Է, Զ after Ո, but Շ is before Ո, Պ after Զ and so on). Thus Mesrop had approached the problem of arranging the letters in the alphabet very logically and had given it such an original solution that the originality of the letters in his alphabet had become more evident.

16

All investigators consider the Armenian alphabet created by Mesrop to be a perfect one. By "perfect" they do not mean the beauty of the letter forms. Beauty in this sense is of course subjective: it is

difficult to define whether the Armenian **Ա** is more beautiful than the Latin A. As every nation gets used to the letters it uses, so they become beautiful. What is of importance is that the letter forms (the drawing) do not cause any difficulty in writing: so to say, they are easy-to-write. There are not any crooked, joined together, winding, multilined letters. This, of course, is one of the advantages of the Mesropian alphabet. To characterize the perfection of the Mesropian alphabet, the following must be taken as criteria: the letter-sound (as a whole, the alphabet-sound system) correspondence, the direction of writing, the absence of other differentiating signs besides the letters and, lastly, orthography.

Creating letters for a language presupposes defining in advance the direction of writing which largely conditions certain peculiarities of the letters as well as the way of writing their sequences (the letter combinations). As we know, writing can be rightward (writing from left to right), leftward (writing from right to left), and downward (writing from top to bottom). Two of the three alphabets known to Mashtots and used by him—Assyrian and Pahlavi—had leftward writing, but one—Greek—had rightward writing. Mesrop chose the rightward writing, which is known from the general history and theory of letters to be more suitable and to represent the highest level of the development of writing. Some scholars explain this choice by Mes-

top as being due to his keen predilection for Greek civilization, but this is a one-side explanation. Without denyng his keenness for the Greek civilization, we think that another criterion played an important role in Mesrop's choice: that is, the system of writing.

It is known that some alphabets have the so-called attached system of writing, while others have a detached system of writing. Two of the three alphabets used by Mesrop (Pahlavi and Assyrian) had an attached system, whereas the Greek had a detached one. The inconvenience of attached writing is that each letter or at least the greater part of the letters have four forms, every one for a different position (separate, at the beginning, in the middle, at the end of the word). For instance, Arabic, which also represents an attached system, has four or even five forms for the greater number of the letters. Thus, for instance, for the letter L it has for separate writing, ل to be attached to the next letter, ل to be attached to the preceding and to the succeeding one, ل to be attached to the preceding letter and, lastly, ل attached to the letter aliph. Arabic has many other such letters. Mesrop, who was well acquainted both with such alphabets and with detached ones, and could well see their advantages and shortcomings, could not, naturally, neg-

lect this fact. But in this case the attached and detached system of writing coincide also with the direction of writing: Pahlavi and Assyrian had a leftward attached system of writing, but Greek having rightward writing, represented a detached system. Thus, for Mesrop, the direction and the system of writing were interconnected, the choice of one was conditioned by the choice of the other. This was the main reason for the choice of the rightward direction by which the problem of the writing system was also solved. So the advantages of the Mesropian alphabet and writing are the rightward writing and the detached system.

The third advantage is also closely connected with the former two. Here, again, Mesrop saw the superiority of Greek writing. As a rule, in Assyrian and Pahlavi writing, the vowels were not written, whereas in Greek they were. Mesrop certainly knew from experience what difficulties and misunderstandings could be caused by not writing the vowels, and he himself made letters for the vowels too. Consequently he had an alphabet including all the sounds of the Armenian language, both consonants and vowels, and there is no sound of old Armenian (in modern linguistic terms—a phoneme) that does not have its written sign in the Mesropian alphabet.

As we see, Mesrop has chosen the best of the alphabets in these three regards and he followed Greek which was superior to the others in all three

respects. Here was the most perfect sample which he could follow, though he highly appreciated the principles of the alphabets he had at hand. But the Mesropian alphabet has advantages which other alphabets used by him lacked. These advantages can be summarized in the following three points:

1. The alphabets known to Mesrop had the drawback that the same letter often expressed different sounds under different conditions. The same sound was also sometimes written by different letters. Even Greek and Latin had this drawback. The latter, which may be considered the most perfect alphabet of its time, was already vulnerable in Mesropian times in this respect. Thus, for instance, the letter *c* was read [ts] before the front vowels *e*, *i* and diphthongs *ae*, and it was read *K* before the back vowels. For the sound *f* the Latin letter *f* was used for the Latin words, and the letter combination *ph* was used for the Greek loans. Mesrop, choosing the principle of one letter for one sound and one sound for one letter, avoided this drawback and created an alphabet which completely reflected all the sounds of old Armenian—each sound with one letter. As a result all the letters, whatever their position, as well as letter combinations (doubles = diphthongs) retained their sound (phonetic) value as the written sign of the same sound or the diphthong. At the same time Mesrop avoided letters having two or three characters (like the Ger-

man *sch*, French *ch*). In this respect the only exception is the letter *nh* which has two characters. But this letter, as we have seen, is not a blind imitation of the Greek, but the result of phonetic conceptions of his time. The conclusion of all this is that at the base of the alphabet created by Mesrop (and also of the orthography, as we shall see below) was the phonetic principle.

2. Most of the old alphabets, including Greek had different signs used to show the correct reading (=the correct pronunciation) of the letters. These consisted of dots below the letters, dots or triangular signs above the letters different kinds of stresses and so on, which gave the letter new sounding of even played the role of a new sound. Such was, for instance, the spiritus asper of Greek. Mesrop made a principle of not having such signs and in his alphabet we find none. Thus the Mesropian alphabet itself completely reflected all the peculiarities of the pronunciation of old Armenian without additional signs.

3. From the history of the language we know that when the letters were being created absolutely uniform Armenian was not spoken in all the provinces of Armenia. This mostly concerns the sounds. One must suppose that there were dialects in different provinces somewhat differing from one another and that there were, accordingly, differences in pronunciation. This is proved by existing linguo-

historical and dialectological investigations. As research has shown, the Mesropian alphabet reflects the phonetic system of not one dialect of the fifth century but of the whole Armenian language. Before the invention of the letters, Mesrop had been to several provinces of Armenia. He was born in the village of Hatsekats of Taron, received his education in Taron, or, as some Armenologists think, in Antick, worked in Vagharshapat, then was in Goghthn. All this enabled him to acquaint himself with the Armenian of different provinces and gain a complete idea of the phonetic system typical of Armenian in general. This explains the fact that the Mesropian alphabet expresses not phonetic variants but their generalities, that is, the phonemes: and this means that the alphabet, in modern terms, is a phonemic alphabet.

These are the peculiarities which characterize the perfection of the Mesropian alphabet and its writing. Mesrop undertook to create the alphabet after a thorough study of the Armenian language and the alphabets known to him. This fact enabled him not only to have a complete idea of the peculiarities of the phonetic system of Armenian, but also to locate the advantages and drawbacks of the alphabets known to him. He made use of their advantages and avoided their drawbacks.

What has been said about the Mesropian alphabet and writing gives us rather a complete idea of the perfection of the Armenian letters. But the letters, their forms, the main principles of writing and so on are not an end in themselves: writing is the system of conventional drawing signs serving to express oral speech in written form. Practically this is accomplished by orthography—that is, by a complex set of rules about how to write words, word combinations, and sentences. On what principles did Mesrop base his orthography? We have already said that one of the advantages of the Mesropian alphabet is the principle of one letter for one sound and one sound for one letter. From the point of view of orthography this means that every sound was written with only one letter, and every letter or letter combination was always read as the same sound or sound combination. This means that Mesrop's most general spelling principle is writing by sound which, using a linguistic term, is called a phonetic principle of writing. This is the main basis of Mesropian orthography. On the basis of the data of the fifth century literature we can define

the following main and partial spelling rules. The writing of the consonants is absolutely phonetic and this principle is not distorted in any way. The duality of writing observed in several words—especially in the case of plosives—is conditioned by dialectal pronunciation (devoicing of voiced sounds accompanied by aspiration or without it). In the spelling of vowels and resonants several rules are consistently used. As we know, old Armenian made no distinction between the quantity of the vowels, though in the translation of Dionysius's grammar the vowels of the Armenian language were also divided into three types (long, short and medium-length). The interpreters explain it in different ways, but the starting point is Greek. Another fact is more important: the vowels, according to their usage, are divided into two types prepositive and postpositive. The interpreters explain this taking into consideration Armenian. It is written in Dionysius's grammar: "The prepositive vowels are six in number: ա, հ, է, ը, ի, ու. and two are postpositive ի, ը" (5, 5). Explaining this definition David writes: "And the prepositives are not near the consonants, but near the vowels, because other vowels can be prepositive to ի (i) and (w) but those can't be" (5, 95). Such an arrangement in Greek is known to have been based on the spelling as well as on the pronunciation of diphthongs. Greek had only weakening diphthongs in which the first vowel was the

syllabic; the non-syllabic vowel might be *i* or *υ*. Our interpreters, of course, conceive and explain this correctly, but taking into account the Armenian language, they add that in Armenian the postpositive vowel *h* also can be prepositive to *ι*, which is quite correct. Nevertheless, our interpreters still stick to the definitions of Greek grammar. Whereas Mesrop, who had studied the phonetics of Armenian and its peculiarities more thoroughly in order to create the alphabet, had been able to solve this problem in his own way. Mesrop applied another principle for the usage of the letters denoting vowels: Armenian had both falling and rising diphthongs, so it was not always the case that the prepositive vowel could be the syllabic. That was why he divided the letters according to the vowel's being syllabic or nonsyllabic. In diphthongs syllabic vowels are always the letters *ա, ռ, հ* (*այ, աւ, ռյ, հւ*) and non-syllabic are always the letters *ւ, յ, ռւ*. The letter *h* is both syllabic and non-syllabic. This classification reflects such orthographic exactness that Mesrop's knowledge is said to be at the level of modern linguistics. To gain such exactness one required the subtle knowledge and differentiation of the phonemes and their manifestations—the sounds (allophones). By the way, those who think that he classified the Armenian sounds with Hropanos's help must take this fact into account and ask themselves how Hropanos, a Greek, could know these

subtleties of the Armenian diphthongs? The classification given above shows that Mesrop had found the main principle of spelling the Armenian diphthongs: he had only to use it in the writing of separate diphthongs, and he did it very well by the following partial rules. Since *h* as a vowel may be both the syllabic of a diphthong (*nh*, *hl*) and the non-syllabic, and as a letter it always represents a syllabic, so the non-syllabic *h* in writing is replaced by *j* in falling diphthongs (*wj*, *nj*) and by *h* in rising diphthong and in a triphthong. Thus he got the following falling diphthongs: *w-h* > *wj*, *n-h* > *nj*, *h-h* > *hj* > *t* in which *h* was not a syllabic and was written by *j* the rising diphthong *h-w* > *hw* and the triphthong *h-wj* > *hwj* in which before the syllabic vowel *w* the non-syllabic *h* was written with *h*, and, lastly, the diphthongs *hl*, *nh* in which *h* was the syllabic and was, naturally, to be written with the letter representing the vowel *h*. A question may arise: why did Mesrop use those three letters for one sound? The answer is very simple: the phoneme *h* of old Armenian represented three allophones a vowel, a resonant as a non-syllabic component of a diphthong, and a consonant. In the Mesropian alphabet the letter *h* represents only the vowel and for the other two there is the letter *j*, but this in its turn is replaced by *h* (*hw*) in a rising diphthong. Here, too, Mesrop displayed a very logical approach. He did not write *j* because before the vowels it represents

the consonant-resonant յ (e. g. յաղագն, տղայի, աղա յաք etc.); he did not write ի because this was read as a syllabic vowel (e. g. միակ, միութիւն, թիոց etc.). Thus he had to find another way out and that was the use of ե: in a rising diphthong he wrote the resonant nonsyllabic ի by ե because this letter was not normally used before the vowels. He has treated ու in the same way. This phoneme also represents three allophones, i. e. a vowel, a non-syllabic item of a diphthong and a consonant. As a consonant it is represented in the Mesropian alphabet by two letters, վ and լ. The former is used only at the beginning of a word; in the middle and at the end of a word—after ո (վարել, վնաս, գետով, ծով, կով and so on). The latter—լ—is used in the middle of a word between two vowels (աւազ, հաւատ, դաւանանք and so on) and at the end of a word after a vowel (հաւ, արդարեւ, թաւ etc.). The signs for the resonant լ as a non-syllabic item of a diphthong are the letters ու and լ, the former for the rising diphthongs (ուա, ուի etc.), the letter for the falling diphthongs (աւ, եւ, իւ). As we see, here, too, Mesrop had a very definite principle and in his way of writing the diphthongs he managed to attain an extreme phonetic exactness and an exceptional differentiation in spelling. The only strange digression is the letter լ in the declension of the words ending in ի. According to his principle Mesrop was to write ու here too (որդուոյ, թագուհուոյ) and not

(*որդիւն*, *թագուն*). In other cases he had acted accordingly; thus we have *պատիւ* but *պատուական*, *անիւ* but *անուակ*, *թիւ* but *թուոյ*, also *առու-առուակ* and so on. Why did not he use the same rule here too? We think that Mesrop's spelling differentiation has a grammatical-morphological basis, as follows. The words ending in the vowel *ի* and belonging to the *ո* declension, differ from the words *պատիւ*, *անիւ*, *թիւ*, as well as *առու*, *կատու*, *նու* and other words in the sense that in the declension of the latter words *ի* does not belong to the ending but to the stem (*պատիւ-ոյ*, *պատուոյ*, *թիւ-ոյ*, *թուոյ*, *առու-ոյ* or *ի առուոյ*, or *առուի* and so on), whereas the declension stem of the following words—*այգի*, *որդի*, *թի*, *թագունի* and the like has neither *ի* nor *ու* which might become a non-syllabic resonant in a diphthong before a vowel. Therefore Mesrop was right to think that in such words the part *ւոյ* as a whole was a declension ending and to distinguish it from the declension forms of the previous words he had to use the spelling differentiation writing *ւ* and not *ու*¹. This was quite a correct and exceptional approach for his time which is nowadays confirmed and admitted in descriptive-structural morphological analyses (the *պատուոյ* as a declension

¹ For a detailed consideration see E. B. Aghaian (8, 100—102, and 356—357).

ending: *որդ-ւոյ, թափուհ-ւոյ, այգ-ւոյ, ոսկ-ւոյ* and so on). As we see, the spelling of the diphthongs and triphthongs invented and adopted by Mesrop has been organised quite scientifically with a consistent principle, thanks to which that spelling has acquired an extremely systematic nature.

A partial spelling rule is that after the resonants *յ* and *հ*, *ղ* was always written and never *լ* (*գայղ, ալղ, շիւղ*, and so on). Later on this rule was not kept, because of the phonetic changes in the Armenian language.

The two letters *է*—*ե* in the Mesropian alphabet are usually interpreted as long (*է*) and short (*ե*). This has, to an extent, a reasonable basis; the sound expressed by the letter *է* as we know in the fifth century Armenian had already stopped being a full diphthong and had become a diphthongoid or just a simple vowel differing from *ե* by closed-open opposition in the pronunciation. Whichever we might admit, we have to concede that they were different phonetic units and the creation of different letters for them was quite necessary; thus in this point too Mesrop was not only right but also quite ingenious and, what is important, consistent in adhering to the general principle of the invention of his alphabet (one letter for one sound and vice versa).

The problem of the letters *վ* and *հ* must be considered separately. The fact that *վ* was written only at the beginning of a word and after the letter

Ո, and Ի was written in all other cases but not at the beginning of a word, has become a basis to think that the letter Վ at the beginning of Վարդ and the last letter Ի in Թաւ were different sounds. Considering this problem from phonemic and phonetic points of view, we have shown that though the letter Վ at the beginning of a word, to a certain extent, had a labiodental pronunciation, nevertheless the dental touch was still very weak, so there was not a considerable difference between the sounds Ի and Վ occurring at the beginning or in the middle of a word (between vowels), on the one hand and at the end of a word on the other. The consonants ւ, Վ at the end of a word were not different sounds either. Judging from this conclusion we have considered Վ and Ի neither different consonant phonemes, nor different sounds. We have considered them to be only pronunciation variants. But such an explanation itself raises the question why Mesrop did not stick to his principle and why he made two letters for one sound. We put forward the following two reasons for this:

1. Mesrop ascribed the combination of the letters Ո and Ի in his alphabet to the vowel ՈԻ for this reason he did not include it in the alphabet as he considered it to be a diphthong. Thus in ancient Armenian as well as in modern Armenian we have the combination of the sounds ո-վ (ով = ov "who") both in words and in grammatical forms like: գե-

տուլ, պատուոյ. If he had written such sound combinations with the letters ո+ւ, he would have identified them with the letter denoting the vowel ու, and if he had written them with the letters ո-ու they would have become a diphthong. Thus there was only one way out: to make a separate letter or some sign to express the consonant Վ after ո. Inventing a sign was excluded because, as we have seen, there are no differentiating signs in the Mesropian alphabet. Mesrop completely rejected them. There was only one means: to make a separate letter in the alphabet to be used only in one case (after the letter ո). This would have dissipation and Mesrop decided to use that letter at the beginning of words as well, the necessity of which was conditioned by the next reason.

2. We have already said that according to the rules of his orthography, Mesrop could not write such a letter at the beginning of a word before a syllabic vowel which in other cases expressed the nonsyllabic vowel of a rising diphthong. The letter *b*, for instance, expressed the non-syllabic of the diphthong *bw*, so the letter *b* could not be written at the beginning of a word before a syllabic vowel. This is the reason why the preposition *ի* at the beginning of a word, becoming a consonant before a vowel is written not by the letters *ի* or *բ* (like *մաքի-մաքբաւ*) but by *ջ* which was not written in rising diphthongs, so it was to be read only as a

consonant. Such triphthongs as *եաւթն*, *եաւղ* are forms that appeared after the classical period and did not exist in Mesrop's time.

This fact also put Mesrop in a difficult position. If he had written the words *վարել*, *վեր*, *վիզ* and the like as *ւարել*, *ւեր*, *ւիզ*, *ուարել*, *ուիզ*, *ուեր*, he would have formed the combinations *ւա*, *ւե*, *ւի*, *ուա*, *ուե*, *ուի* before a consonant and they would have become diphthongs, whereas by pronunciation they were to reflect the sound combination—the consonant *վ*+a vowel. Here too he had to resort to another means; that is to make a new letter. But as the letter *վ* already existed which was written only after *ո*, so it might be used for the beginning of the word too and this Mesrop did.

All these partial and general rules we have spoken about show that Mesrop had universally taken into consideration the peculiarities of the pronunciation of our language and had defined the rules of the usage of each letter with absolute exactness. Not only his alphabet but also his spelling express all the peculiarities of the sound system of old Armenian with absolute exactness and reflect extreme systematicity. It is astonishing how a fifth century scientist could create such an exact alphabet with such subtleties, with the phoneme and allophone, diphthong and monophthong diversities and a spelling system which cannot be found fault with. What several Armenologists consider a drawback (the

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Ը	Ձ	Պ	Փ
Ռ	Ղ	Ջ	Ժ

MESROP-MADE ARMENIAN LETTERS

1. According to the construction records of Sahak Kamsarakan inscribed on a stone on the western facade of Tekor Church (5th cent.).
2. According to the polympsest of the 1st manuscript cover of Sanasarian school (5th cent.).
3. According to the inscription on the southern wall of Yeghvard Church (6th cent.).
4. According to the construction records of Catholicos Komitas of Hripsime Church (618).
5. According to the signs of the sundial of Zvartnots Cathedral (642—653).
6. According to the construction records of Grigor Mamikonian inscribed on the eastern facade of Arutj Cathedral (7th cent.).
7. According to the records of architect Todasak of Athen Church (7th cent.).

Compiled by L. SADOYAN

two-sign letter *մ*, two consonant letters—*վ*, *լ* are not drawbacks at all. They have their scientific foundations, corresponding at least to the scientific level of the period. It is generally assumed that those who have created the alphabet of a language have been great phonologists. It is true, of course, and it is especially true of Mesrop Mashtots. But Mesrop was not only a phonologist. He was the greatest linguist of his time in the broadest sense of the word. He had minutely studied the dialects of different places and had a clear idea of the general phonetic system of the Armenian language, and he had thoroughly studied the grammatical structure of our language. In working out the rules of spelling, he took into account grammar data as well.

In creating the Armenian alphabet and an excellent spelling system, Mesrop Mashtots proved himself to be a great scientist. The writing and the spelling system created by him are really the product of a genius's mind. His enlightening activity, the 35 years of indefatigable and fruitful work devoted to setting up a wide network of schools and teaching were an activity of a great enlightener. This activity was of paramount importance for the Armenian people, not only in the fifth century but also in succeeding centuries, up to the present day. But the weightiest part of his activity is the vigorous and effective literary-cultural movement which he

started and led together with Sahak Partev. That activity was indeed the essence of his great mission. When we acquaint ourselves with our translated and original literature of the first half of the fifth century, what strikes the eye is not only the great amount of literature for such a short period of time (after the creation of the alphabet till 450 the number of works, translated or original, we currently have is 50, but how many had disappeared or been destroyed!) but also the diversity of its contents.

Mesrop's mission was not only of a cultural importance, it had an entirely deliberate and purposeful scientific, ideological and political contents.

From the scientific point of view, Mesrop and his pupils laid the foundation for the flight of scientific fancy the manifestation of which are Khorenatsi's "History", David Anhaght's philosophical works, the translation of the grammar by Dionysius and, its Armenien interpretations, which were not mere grammars but a survey of literature, indeed a survey of art in general. A little later, in the seventh century, came Shirakatsi's mathematic, astronomical works and works on chronology.

From the ideological and political point of view the movement to strengthen Christianity started and led by Mesrop assured the establishment of Armenian Christianity as the national ideology of the Armenian people. The direct powerful manifestation

of this was the war of Vardanants in the middle of the century, which was our first national-liberation war armed with the ideology of Armenian Christianity. It was again that ideology that, after the council of Chalcedon in 451, separated the Armenian church from the Assyrian and the Greek churches, freed the Armenian church from their influence and established its independence, and that implies the establishment of the ideology of national independence.

Finally, the unprecedented development of a unified culture laid the foundation of the ideological-political union of all the Armenian people, of the unification of the spiritual edifice that manifested itself through culture and in culture. This (unification) enabled the Armenian people to withstand destructive incursions, barbarian invasions, destruction and massacre, the ruinous rule of ferocious hordes that plagued Armenia in the succeeding centuries. Mesrop Mashtots considered this to be the aim of his mission and he succeeded in it. Neither the foreign domination, nor massacres nor genocide were able to suppress the courage and energy of the Armenian people, the strength of their mind and their will to create. By the light of Mesrop's torch the Armenian people strove to preserve their existence and

their independence. And they did preserve it. They have survived till the period of their present happiness, contributing to the world cultural treasury the monuments of their great culture—in the Armenian language, bearing the values of all humanity.

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Հրատ. խմբագիր՝ Լ. Գ. Մանուկյան, նկարիչ՝ Լ. Ա. Սաղոյան, գեղ. խմբագիր՝ Ն. Ա. Թովմասյան, տեխն. խմբագիր՝ Հ. Ս. Ալվրցյան:

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Հանձնված է շարվածքի 07. 07. 1986 թ.: Ստորագրված է տպագրության 16. 12. 1987 թ.: Չափեր $60 \times 84^{1/32}$: Թուղթ № 1: Տառատեսակը «Սովորական»: Տպագրության եղանակը «Բարձր»: Հրատարակչական 3,7 մամուլ+5 ներդիր: Տպագրական 3,25 մամուլ=3,0 պայմանական մամուլի: Տպաքանակ 10000: Պատվեր 1365: Գինը՝ 40 կ.:

Երևանի համալսարանի հրատարակչություն, Երևան, Մոսկվյան փ. № 1:

Երևանի համալսարանի տպարան, Երևան, Աբովյան փ. № 52:

U_a J_ž X_č R_ř

F_b P_i V_m U_s

G_g L_l Z_y Č_v

D_d T_x N_n S_t

E_e O_c Š_š R_r

Q_z Y_k O_o Ž_ž

H_ē L_h Q_č T_w

L_ə Q_j P_p Φ_{ṗ}

R_t L_† Z_ǰ F_{k̂}